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ABSTRACT

The papers in this collection reflect some of the ideas about children, teachers and environments for learning which resulted from participation in the "yards" at Pacific Oaks Friends School, an open education environment established by Quakers for preschool and elementary aged children. Each of the eight articles focuses on either the problem of clarifying the goals of the open classroom or the risks entailed in learning by discovery. In Section One (containing four papers), the meaning of open education is discussed, suggestions for planning and communicating an emergent curriculum are provided, results of a follow-up study of Pacific Oaks primary students' transition to other schools are reported, and ways of discussing emotionally sensitive topics with children are demonstrated. In Section Two (four papers), the open education teacher's role as an authority with power is explored and teacher interventions in children's activities are listed, implications of Piagetian theory for the development of social consciousness are discussed, a staff discussion of children's use of words that upset adults is reported, and strategies for identifying the intervening in the activities of isolates are provided. Briefly, in postscript, the teacher's status in American society is discussed. (Author/RH)

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as experienced in
nursery/kindergarten/primary
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Introduction: Teachers as Learners

Elizabeth Jones

The working title of this book was *Teachers as Learners*, and that is really what it's all about. Each of the papers in this collection represents teachers' efforts to discover meaningful patterns in their day-to-day experiences--to create a personal view of the world of adults and children, which can serve as a thoughtful framework for action.

Programs for young children at Pacific Oaks are based on an "open classroom" model. Fads and fashions in education come and go, and schools have experienced a recent swing from fairly widespread interest in more open structure to increasing emphasis on "back to basics." Pacific Oaks, in contrast, has been relatively consistent in its philosophy throughout its thirty-year history. Our resistance to swings in fashion comes from our way of working and learning together, and from our faith in human beings as active learners. We see the open classroom as "peopled with learners working together on many different levels."[1]

In an open classroom, children choose the majority of their own activities. Adults are responsible for structuring an environment full of developmentally appropriate choices, helping children choose among the possibilities, and enriching their experience by joining in it and building on it. The notion of "teacher-proof" curricula, rationally designed by specialists to insure excellence of instruction regardless of the teacher's skill, has no place in such a classroom. Standardized plans made by someone outside a setting as complex as a day-to-day class of children cannot possibly be appropriate to the unique events which keep happening in that class. Good curriculum emerges out of those unique events. Curriculum specialists and administrators can, at best, establish guidelines; it is the teacher's job to respond to and guide the day-to-day dynamics of the learning process. To do so, he/she must continue to function as an active learner, contributing his/her share to the emergent curriculum, but responding to input from all the other learners in the setting as well.

We see teaching as an art, not a predictable science. It is learned by doing and by continual question-asking and reflection. Learners are individuals, and their interests and unique characteristics need to be taken seriously. Teaching and learning involve a relationship between persons who need to work continually at understanding each other. These are the assumptions which underlie the open classroom at Pacific Oaks.

The Setting

The traditional classroom, as experienced by child and adult learners alike, has four walls, desks and chairs, books and papers, and a teacher up in front imparting information. Students are expected to sit still and listen, write, and read.

The learning environment experienced by children and adults in Pacific Oaks children's programs is commonly referred to not as a classroom, but as a "yard." The program is indoor/outdoor the year round, and outdoors, in the yards, is where much of the action takes place.

The rooms, though fairly small, are interesting--with lofts, rugs and cushions, housekeeping corners, blocks, children's paintings on the walls. But the yards are spectacular--with huge oaks and eucalyptus, live animals and duck ponds, home-designed climbing structures, cargo nets, and seemingly acres of sandboxes. Ground surfaces are dirt, not asphalt, and there's room for digging. In plentiful supply are wood for carpentry, clay, paint, paper, and glue. Children do many different things, more of them individually or in small groups than in a teacher-directed total group.

What's it all about? What are these children--some two hundred of them, ranging in age from infancy to nine years--learning in this free-flowing setting? When do teachers teach? Don't parents get anxious? In a setting so unlike the "real world" of the schools, how can college students learn to become competent teachers?

---

[1] Mary E.D. Scudder, *A Classroom of Alternatives*. Plainfield, VT: Goddard College, Master's Project, 1972, p. 2.

These are questions frequently asked by visitors; they are addressed by the papers in this collection. Some of the answers may be found in day-to-day practice; some, in our philosophic roots.

Roots

Pacific Oaks children's programs began in 1945 as part of Pacific Oaks Friends School, a Quaker venture in education toward a more peaceful world. Committed from its beginning to cradle-to-grave education, the school has seen various program changes, including the addition of a teacher education program, which became Pacific Oaks College, now with more than 350 adult students of human development. The children's programs, beginning as a nursery school, have expanded to include both younger and older children--the entire early childhood range.

The philosophic roots of this approach to education, for children and college students alike, are several. They reinforce each other, and have been influential in more or less the following order:

1. The Quaker tradition. Pacific Oaks was founded by a small group of Friends families who wanted to contribute to a more peaceful world. Friends believe that there is that of God in every man--that each of us is of value; and that we each have valid experience, that truth is constantly being discovered. Quakers work hard at being open to possible new truths, and at listening to each other. They feel free--obligated, in fact--to express their values to each other.

2. The nursery education/child study tradition. Children are interesting people, worth learning about and learning from. They are natural investigators and don't need to be pressured to learn. They need an environment rich in sensory experiences and choices, interaction with peers, guidance from adults. They learn through play.

3. Progressive education, as articulated by John Dewey and some of his followers. Here the emphasis is on learning through experience, and on individual self-expression through the arts, as basic to education. It is important to keep the child lively, alert, curious, and creative, and to encourage him/her to explore all means of expression which contribute to the development of intelligence and judgment--to the growth of a whole person.

4. Those theories in developmental psychology which emphasize social-emotional--as well as cognitive--development. With Erik Erikson, we are keenly interested in understanding the developmental tasks of each stage of growth and in providing a healthy environment which can free the individual to love and to work.

With Lois Murphy, we are interested in individual differences in style, and we tend to see each person as competent, motivated, and able to develop appropriate coping skills.

Jean Piaget has been very helpful to us in his delineation of stages in cognitive and moral growth, particularly in his emphasis on the need for active encounter with the physical world and interaction with peers to build one's own understanding of the world.

5. Humanistic psychology. Of the numerous thinkers in this area, we probably talk about Maslow and Rogers most frequently. We find that their emphasis on the person's intrinsic motivation for growth, and their discussion of the conditions which free individuals to grow, are confirmed by our own experience.

That last sentence is important. We're not trying to follow a particular theory. Rather, we are looking for patterns in our own experiences and relating them to any other theories which help to clarify them.

Within the framework of these underlying assumptions about which values matter most, we follow our experience where it leads us. We want students to do the same, beginning in early childhood. We are concerned that children have opportunities for active learning, for invention rather than rote learning, with the goal of both intellectual and moral independence.

Education is a lifelong affair. We are all learners; we are all continuously in process. Knowledge and truth are emergent; they are never fully revealed. Adults and children together are seekers.

This Book

The papers in this collection reflect some of the learnings by adults--about children, themselves, and environments for learning--which have taken place in this setting. They include frank accounts of the risks as well as the joys of teaching in this setting--accounts of some of our mistakes and misunderstandings, and what we have learned from them. Children are described as behaving in ways we don't like, as well as in ways we like very much. We are dealing directly with issues such as: How can we exert the natural authority of adults with children, without becoming either arbitrary or wishy-washy? How can we keep in good contact with every child, avoiding the temptation to give most of our attention to the children whom we find most personally satisfying to be with? How can we keep our cool when a six-year-old lets loose a barrage of "forbidden" words? We had to examine our willingness to reveal ourselves in these ways in print, particularly when we read some of the words from our recorded discussions ("Children's Words That Bother Adults"). But after further discussion, we found ourselves in agreement that it is some of the risks we experience that are particularly important to share. Too much of the literature about teaching has been well-laundered.

Ultimately, what we care most about is the moral development of both children and teachers. An active-learning approach has moral as well as intellectual implications. To be effective and productive members of modern society, children need to learn that they are capable of exercising ethical and intellectual autonomy. In Piaget's words, these constitute an "indissoluble whole":

> *...it is not possible to create independent personalities in the ethical area if the individual is also subjected to intellectual constraint to such an extent that he must restrict himself to learning by rote without discovering the truth for himself. If he is intellectually passive, he will not know how to be free ethically. Conversely, if his ethics consist exclusively in submission to adult authority, and if the only social exchanges that make up the life of the class are those that bind each student individually to a master holding all power, he will not know how to be intellectually active.*[2]

If children are to risk learning by discovery, which often involves making mistakes, the teacher must also be willing to take risks and to share them frankly. In Nancy Place's words:

> *...the most important thing we do, along with setting clear limits, is to be up-front about the mistakes we, as adults, make. I said, "Oh, shut up!" to a child the other day, and he looked at me in surprise and said, "You can't say that." And I said, "You're right, I can't."*
>
> *...If the children can't use words to put people down, neither can I. It's in discussing our common problems that we build respect for each other.*[3]

Mistakes and self-exposure become not something to be avoided at all costs, but an intellectual challenge and a shared responsibility.

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[2] Jean Piaget, *To Understand is to Invent*. New York: Grossman (Viking Press), 1973, p. 107.

[3] See page 122.

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I. CLARIFYING GOALS OF THE OPEN CLASSROOM

1. Open Education in Pacific Oaks Children's Programs

Doris Smith

A child brought a package of bones to school for the teacher's dog, which had been in an accident.

A phone call came to the teacher at home from a girl, inquiring, "When is the new boy going to start school?"

The teacher visited a child hospitalized with asthma, relieving the family for a few hours.

The group sat together holding hands, sending some love to one boy whose face was badly swollen from a dog bite, but who still wanted to come to school that day.

An almost overlooked note was discovered on the bottom line of a teacher's notebook: "I love you from ...," signed by a boy who could say it no other way.

Are these indicators of a quality of life to you?

A very delicate little girl, not yet six, announced to the group, "I have a story to tell you," from which evolved a lovely, magical fairy tale, which held us spellbound for ten or fifteen minutes.

There occurred the metamorphosis of a boy from one who felt so insecure that he threatened, bribed, cajoled and manipulated to assure himself of a buddy each day, into one who can work on independent projects, enjoy one or two friends, and participate in group projects. He is still changing; now he is beginning to allow himself to take risks in trying something new in front of his peers and he, at long last, will be able to allow himself to risk losing his top dog position for a moment.

A boy whose responses consistently were "I don't know" and "I can't" became one whose ideas are positive, profound, and followed through to completion.

The growth is evident in a girl who once was so upset when her friend was with someone else when she arrived that she pouted all day, and who now proudly brings snakeskins and treasures to share, has a variety of friends, and reacts more flexibly to situations.

A docile, quiet, submissive girl, who was often ignored or overlooked, is now a stronger, more confident girl who stamps her feet and says, "I've had enough."

Are these real people to you with real feelings and real reactions to real situations?

A boy carefully made a frame, measured it, brought the teacher the data, asked for a piece of wood *that* big for his construction, trusted the teacher to get it, and experienced true satisfaction when it arrived the next day and it fit the frame!

A boy brought his Daddy Rabbit to school to stay with Mother Rabbit, instigated the investigation of gestation periods, witnessed the nesting and birth process and postnatal development of the bunnies. What he planned to happen really did!

A child asked on a hike one day, "I wonder how rocks were formed?" and thus initiated a project which included looking in books for answers, rock-crushing experiments, acid experiments on rocks, and a visit from a geologist father who brought an ultra-violet light for examination and identification of rocks.

The day after the group visited an ecology center and observed, among other things, snake holes and gopher holes, Terry wrote in his writing book, "The mouse went into the gopher hole and the gopher..."

Another day a trip was made to a friend's organic garden, and in response to a question about the insects on the plants, the relationship between lady bugs and aphids was explained.

Some days later I observed in the yard a tag-like game involving two teams. Closer listening revealed that the Aphid and Lady Bug teams were chasing each other.

At the stained glass window factory the guide was explaining the process of getting glass from the buib stage into the flat glass stage, commenting, "You can't use it when it's still in a ball." Sally remarked thoughtfully, "Yes, you could if you wanted a three-dimensional picture."

Abby was trying to get her leg through the rings on the swinging apparatus. "It won't reach," she said, "it's too high." Would I lift her? I asked if there was some way she could make the rings lower. She said they were too high where they were and too low at the bottom. I asked if there was any place on the chain that would be the right height. She said no and stretched her leg up to the ring. I made a mental note that experiences related to the "middle of things" would be appropriate for her.

A group of boys decided to find out which is heavier--sand, gravel, or cement--the ingredients they had used to build the fish pond. And later, another group took pieces of paper one foot square to find the area around the fish pond to be sodded. They recorded the data for use when ordering the grass.

A child said, "Let's have a store," and insisted that she meant a real store. There followed a highly active experience of creating a "Halloween Store", planning items for sale, making and purchasing the items, a trip to a candy factory, discovering the concept of wholesale and retail ("If I paid 5¢ for candy at the candy factory we'd better charge 6¢ or 7¢ at our store"), keeping charts of money spent and money earned. Involved were very serious discussions of how much each pumpkin weighed, if it should be put on the big or little pumpkin shelf--because they had different prices--and very important experiences with real money.

Do you see how real life situations create learning opportunities?

Open Education Means Learning Can Happen at All Times

As soon as one explodes the myth that learning happens between nine and two in the school room, one is on the path toward understanding open education. Indeed the problem is ours, not the children's, I discovered this year. Learning to recognize letters via soup cans, gas station signs or Sesame Street is every bit as valid as, and perhaps more valid than, learning via ditto sheets at school. We, in the schools, must recognize this, accept it, and support it. If and when we can do this, then the walls will start to break down between school learning and real life learning. The more authentic the learning situation, the more lasting is the learning that goes on.

For example, the recall, recognition and comprehension of Key Words (Ashton-Warner, 1963) we worked with far surpassed that which we saw when the children were working with vocabulary-building activities from the readers. Of course we should have predicted this if we believe Piaget when he says that we cannot make learning happen. The learner must act on something for learning to occur:

> *To know an object, to know an event is not simply to look at it and make a mental copy or image of it. To know an object is to act on it. To know is to modify, to transform the object and to understand the process of this transformation and as a consequence to understand the way the object is constructed...An operation is thus the essence of knowledge. It is an interiorized action which modifies the object of knowledge.* (Jennings, 1967)

Also, "Even in order to understand we have to invent, or, that is, to reinvent, because we can't start from the beginning again. But I would say that anything is only understood to the extent that it is reinvented." (Jennings, 1967)

I have a fantasy of sharing the following episode with Dr. Piaget. I am confident that his sensitive mind and heart would appreciate it:

> *Early one morning someone casually asked Sandy, "Do you know which came first, the chicken or the egg?" Sandy does not take life lightly. He carefully pondered the question and slowly replied, "Well, I guess the chicken came first. But no, that chicken came from an egg, so I guess the egg came first. But the egg came from a chicken, so maybe they both came first."*
>
> *Sandy went back to his building work but continued to work on this thought.*

> *During the morning we observed Sandy asking almost everyone in the group this key question. If they replied "the chicken" he would carefully and seriously explain to them, "But do you understand that the chicken came from an egg and the egg came from a chicken?"*
>
> *Later that afternoon the group visited a father in his new office in a downtown skyscraper. After a tour of the building, the group was invited to sit in the conference room. The father said, "Boys and girls, my job is a lawyer, and it is difficult to explain what a lawyer does, but one of the things he does is try to answer people's questions." At this Sandy shot out of his leather chair and asked, "Do you know which came first, the chicken or the egg?" The lawyer replied, "Sorry. That is a very good question, but I really don't know." And Sandy slumped back into his chair, despondent that this fountain of knowledge didn't have the answer.*
>
> *As we were riding home, I heard Sandy elaborating in the back seat to his friends, "But you see, there's not that much difference between a chicken and an egg, and a person and a baby, so we really don't know which came first, a person or a baby."*

Do you think Sandy that day was reinventing for himself the concept of evolution, or of succession, or was it a beginning awareness of time and history? Outer labels don't matter so much as the fact that Sandy truly learned something that day. He mentally acted on it.

Open Education Means an Opportunity to Choose

One of the elements which fosters optimal active learning is choice. Surely by choosing one is already acting on something. One notices in an article entitled "When Children Enjoy School" by Roland Barth that three out of the seven significant elements he lists involve this important aspect of choice. Needless to say, Barth states in the same article that no one guarantees that children will or should enjoy school per se, but enjoyment seems to be one of the *by-products* of good open education. The list follows:

> 1. *A child's enjoyment of school is related to the number of significant options available to him each day.*
> 2. *A child's enjoyment of school is related to his having significant choice in determining the activity in which he will be engaged.*
> 3. *A child's enjoyment of school is related to his being able to pose his own problems and determine the manner in which he will pursue them--with respect to the materials and activities available to him.*
> 4. *A child's enjoyment of school is related to the extent to which he is permitted to collaborate with his peers.*
> 5. *A child's enjoyment of school is related to the extent to which he is trusted by adults.*
> 6. *A child is likely to enjoy school to the extent that it has a climate of consistent order.*
> 7. *A child's enjoyment of school is associated with the extent to which explicit and implicit comparisons between his performance and the performance of other children are minimized.* (Barth, 1970)

Throughout the nursery school experience, Pacific Oaks has traditionally fostered the importance of authentic choice. This is one of the key elements the parents and staff were determined to continue in the primary program. Many preschool educators have realized that through authentic choice the child learns about himself, his world, and others in it. He builds feelings of self-esteem as he experiences more and more positive moments. He also learns about success and failure and that these are both valuable experiences. Choice appropriate to age level is one of the common denominators of Pacific Oaks groups, along with the belief in the uniqueness of each individual. The messages given and received by choice-making individuals--"I am worthwhile." "You value me." "I can trust myself and you and my environment."--are vibrant and alive. If teachers could see this dimension as a positive force they would indeed experience some selfish enlightenment, because, as a result of choice, the learning is more lasting, the child is happier, and the need for teacher-imposed discipline diminishes.

However, before effective choices occur, certain conditions must be met. First of all, the element of trust must be fostered. The child must be able to trust that his environment is a safe place. He must be able to feel that he won't get bopped over the head or socked in the stomach at any moment. Of course these things sometimes happen, but the prevailing mood should be "I'm safe here." If not, the child spends his time worrying that he will get hurt. He then must trust himself and others. By meeting the child at the gate, by home visits, by planning for individual children, one says, "You're O.K. and important, and your ideas are important."

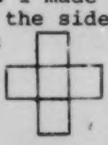
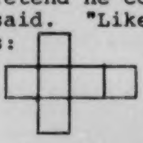
When the child can trust himself and feels safe, then he is free to start exploring. Sometimes his choices are to find out why, to find out specific answers, to do specific things. And sometimes his choices are highly creative, exploratory, messing-around choices, to see what will happen.

One of the differences I observed between the schools I visited in England and our group at Pacific Oaks is related to this matter of choice. In England, where I was, there were multiple choices in all areas, but these were usually task-oriented. There was not much evidence of real experiential choice which comes from the child. This is basic and philosophically important. I think true open education is based on the growth model which says learning is organic, experiential, and developmental. Growth happens along many pathways individually. The growth model assumes that the child innately grows in a positive direction and loves to learn unless there are inhibiting stresses. In contrast, the dissemination model says "I know what you need to know, and I will show you how." The teachers in England generally had done a superb job of building a trusting relationship with the child, so that his learning was indeed self-actualized. Teachers stretched the children in the kindest way, but the message was always there that someone was disseminating the information. Often this was done through task cards, which were used by choice, and involved the child with tangible materials. Interestingly, task cards developed as a practical solution for teachers who couldn't buy the workbooks for each child. They simply transferred the material to cards for the class. The English workbooks are not just paper-pencil tasks; they get the child to move, to act, and to learn through his senses.

My experience has been that with the Pacific Oaks group invariably there must be a "need to know" for a task. If I put out a task card to measure the perimeter of three things, they will respond, "Why?" I respect this and work with it. True enough, many tasks are fun, mind-stretching, problem-solving, logical thinking exercises. There is a place for these tasks in our program, but they are not fundamental to our educational starting point. We use the term *germinating ideas* often and tend to build our program from that starting point. The fish pond, the Halloween store, the mini-Fair, the incubator and duck eggs--all started from a germinating idea. At this point I'm sure the English educators would say, "Aha, you're sounding very much like a Dewey Progressive, and that's where we part company." In England there is no confusion about who is the authority. The teacher, although not a dictator, is very much in the steering position. I find myself about halfway between pure Dewey and pure British Infant School philosophies.

Open Education Means Time Allowed to Follow Through an Interest

Because of what I am continually bombarded with in the yard, when free choice is allowed, I become more and more humble about imposing activities on the children. If the environment is well supplied with good equipment, provocative and open-ended materials, and if (and only if) the atmosphere in the yard is serious and purposeful, then amazing things occur.

A six-year-old boy builds a table with some adult help. It is full-sized and is used as a work table for some time. A month later he returns to the table and adds a second layer. It is now a double-decker bed. A month later he encloses the top layer and it becomes a fort/hide-out. As this is happening over a period of three to five months the child alternates between intense involvement and detachment. However, this experience is being internalized somehow. We observe him building the same structure in clay one day. The information, skill, and conceptual learning gained through this experience is phenomenal. Estimation of length, size, height, width, awareness of angles, experience of weight, standard and non-standard measurement, experience with area and perimeter are some of the observations I made of this boy at work. One day I asked him to take a cube and pretend he could slit the sides. Could he imagine what it would look like? "Oh, sure," he said. "Like this:  but it wouldn't have a top. With a top it would look like this:  ."

When the child makes choices, he becomes highly involved in his activities. Out of respect for this, he is normally allowed to follow through with his interest. There seems to be a saturation point in learning which occurs intrinsically.

> *Bob discovered one day that he could blast a cup of sand off the end of a board by hitting the other end. He became fascinated with this and stayed with it for about an hour. He was not bombing to hit anyone but was obviously excited by the physics involved. I noticed that every day for five days following Bob would sooner or later be found in the same place, practicing the same activity, but each time adding a more complicated dimension. He put two cups, one on each end of the board, different materials in the cups--sand, gravel, feathers. He moved the cups forward and backward. There is no question that Bob was actively involved in this and needed time to repeat and repeat the activity. Too often we assume that the child has learned it after one or two experiences. It seems to take much longer for the experience to really become his. Finally, when I asked Bob if he could draw a picture of what he was doing, he very cooperatively and proudly drew a diagram of his double catapult invention.*

Recently I heard a mother exclaim that her child was going to an art workshop and had made eighteen tie-dyes--"He spends all of his time tie-dyeing!" Of course this child is having the same kind of saturation experience (no pun intended). He is internalizing tie-dyeing and will truly know what is happening and how it happens when he is through.

Do you see the integration of learning and experience?

Open Education Means Integrating Learning and Experience: Integrating All Subjects

In her book, *The Integrated Day in the Primary School*, Mary Brown (1969) speaks of the importance of the word *integrated* in this sense--integrating learning and experience. Sometimes we think integrated day means only integrating the subjects.

A boy received a new bow and arrows and asked to go to the Arroyo to shoot. I sent him with an adult. When he returned, I asked, "How many arrows did you shoot?" "Oh, I don't know," he said. "I have eight arrows and I guess I shot ten sets of eight." "How many is that?" I asked. "I don't know." "Can you figure it out?" "Oh, sure," and he drew ten sets of eight arrows and counted them.

This year I have seen children learn to count and measure by making knapsacks, by polling the school to find out the favorite kind of juice and crackers, by cooking and baking treats, and by finding out how many can roller skate ("Should we have a roller skating party?").

Also, through choice, the Key Vocabulary Words (as described by Sylvia Ashton-Warner, 1963) were so individual that the children were intrinsically motivated (as Hunt would say) to learn to read them and to use them in their writing. Creative writing did not need to be artificially fostered. Writing with one's own words seems to be an aesthetic satisfaction.

For many of the children this writing and key word experience was the springboard for reading. If one begins when the child shows signs of interest, reading will happen--if the staff does not miss the opportunity.

> *Learning is not linear. There is no single way to master a concept or learn a skill...A child may be moving towards the mastery of a single concept from a number of different paths at the same time...Individual learning style is as important in determining institutional methodology as the definition of goals.* (Spodek, 1971)

There is much discussion and disagreement among educators about the subject of teaching reading. My experience tends to support Furth's position in his book, *Piaget for Teachers* (1970), that reading is pushed upon children much too early, and therefore reading problems are created. Minimal physiological perceptual problems actually become more exaggerated under stress. The stress seems to be built into our schools with the emphasis on reading scores. Once again we have made a problem for ourselves. As Furth says, if one waits for signs from the child, waits for his choice, reading is not all that difficult.

I am also very interested in the hypothesis that there is a strong correlation between conservation and reading. If a word is a symbol for something else, how can we expect a young child to comprehend the two things at once, before he can conserve? Furthermore, decoding is strictly a follow-the-rules activity. This development comes at the operational level. "Concrete operational thought is a necessary prerequisite to formal operations, because it makes possible the comprehension of rules upon which all formal education is based." (Elkind, 1970)

If we can follow the lead of intrinsic motivation, our reading successes will be much greater.

Open Education Means an Opportunity to Verbalize

During the choice-making process, a child finds some things which s/he can do and some things which s/he cannot do. Children experience many successes and some failures, but this is all acceptable. By talking about what they are doing, children often get new insights and perspectives from their peers.

Although thought always follows action, language and thought are not always reversible. Many times we make assumptions, because of a child's use of language or lack of use of language, which are highly inaccurate. For instance, a child may be measuring cupfuls and saying "I have six cupfuls." As we look closely we may observe his cupfuls to be one-half cup or three-fourths of a cup or anywhere in between. His idea of cupful is highly different from ours. However, through working and discussing with others, he will soon notice that Mary fills her cup up and calls it a cupful, and so does Ann. Indeed, it was through the children's wrong answers that Piaget gained his strongest insights into children's thinking.

When children have an opportunity to verbalize, they are able to correct their misconceptions, value their own and others' ideas and opinions, and begin to decenter their egocentric thoughts. When I asked a group what it was like when their friend was sick, one answer was, "When my friend is sick, she doesn't play with me." Conversely, at other times I have heard the children say, "I know how you feel." By telling children to be quiet we are stifling one of the most fruitful channels for learning.

In Pacific Oaks children's programs the activity we see strongly resembles age-appropriate behavior described as "play." We are very much like real life. Therefore, success and failure are part of daily experience. For this reason I again resist a totally planned program, because the desirability of success is usually built into these things. A child needs to know it's O.K. to start something and find it isn't his cup of tea that day. Random behavior has a rhythm to it which is organic and must not be jostled by interference.

Open Education Means Opportunity for the Teacher to Write Her Own Curriculum, To Be a Learner, To Have Success and Failure

When does the teacher do anything and what does the teacher do if all the learning depends on the learner? David Hawkins (1974) helps me express the role of the teacher:

> *Authority is a way in which human beings are related to each other, and it is connected with the word "respect". If someone plays a role of an authority in your life this means that you respect him. In other words, authority is one of the primary sources of learning. To be an authority in this sense, to be a teacher whom children honestly respect because you give them something which helps them on the way and which they know they couldn't get themselves, is to be a teacher.*

(I also take comfort in his words: "Teachers express themselves through the work they do, through the human beings who have been their pupils, and not by writing little papers.")

The teacher then must be responsible for knowing each child as totally as possible, and must understand where he is socially, emotionally, physically, and intellectually. Parents and administrators need to be reminded what a good buy open education is for the tax dollar. Instead of focusing only on the skills area, a good open educator really strives to work in all areas. I suggest that teachers in open classrooms invariably spend a large percentage of their dreams on their children--the relationship is that intense. To develop this rapport and understanding, home visits are involved, and parent conferences, phone calls, and careful day-to-day anecdotal observations. At this point the teacher may be partially able to understand what is appropriate behavior and where the child might be going next.

The teacher is not a passive observer nor is she an arbitrary disseminator of information.

She tries to be an enthusiastic friend who truly is excited by a child's observations, discoveries, and interests and uses these areas to foster the skills needed. She values conceptual growth and trusts the innate love of learning she witnesses daily if outside forces do not interfere with natural growth. The teacher constantly enhances the environment to stimulate new ideas, creative approaches, problem-solving, and observation of detail. She always preplans, often uses her plans, sometimes finds a variation, and sometimes discards plans for spontaneous experience.

David Hawkins (1974) says: "What is wrong with the programer's art is that it puts the most essential motivation for learning, the exploratory, in a strait jacket and robs the learner of that autonomy which is the chief means of self-education, reducing him to a state of passive obedience or active rebellion."

Pacific Oaks' open classroom was an experience for me in literally writing my own curriculum. Inherent in this is the aspect of being a learner, too, and so of having success and failure experiences. Writing one's own curriculum is in no way "teacher-proof". My own personal conviction that one actually writes one's own book in living greatly influenced this approach for me. Unique individuals sharing together (the "it" of Hawkins's I-thou-it concept) are not going to be described in books written by others. Of course, as I read avidly (occupational hazard), and talk about education with others constantly, I distill this information for my own use.

The responsibility of this approach to education is much greater and for me the job is much more rewarding than that of a syllabus approach. Teaching is a highly refined art/science, demanding both skill and sensitivity. Its beauty is that one never "learns the job"; one is always growing and changing. For the adult, teaching can be as close to living as active learning is to real life. Artificial teaching methods are only as effective as artificial materials. Anything which makes people act not as real people--not as human beings to human beings--is not valid teaching, I feel. What mixed messages we give children when we do this to them! However, being a responsible adult is very important in implementing an open classroom. To be responsible is to ask: Is each child moving ahead in skill areas? Is each child over a long range having a balanced experience? Are each child's social, emotional and intellectual needs being realized? How can I help each child grow in his unique way? The kinds of things that happen to a child as he is learning are critical.

Perhaps most challenging and helpful is the afterschool daily planning session. The teacher thinks through what did happen, what didn't happen, and what she can do to facilitate more. She values her intuition/experience but is aware that intuition is based on perception. Sometimes perception is not accurate, so she tries to verify her intuition with observation.

Open Education Means an Indoor-Outdoor Authentic Environment

Because authenticity is so important in learning, one must be exposed to the real world. Artificial devices are increasingly abstract for the learner and less effective. I find them good as reinforcers and for diagnostic purposes. I ask myself if there is any way to do what this material does in a more authentic way. If not, I use it for its purpose. Dienes blocks for place value fall into this category. Place value is a concept the blocks teach extremely well. So, also, attribute blocks are wonderful reinforcers in logical thinking about sets, attributes, etc. However, talking about each other and using their own attributes for set theory probably would have more meaning to children at first: "These are all boys; these are boys with jeans; these are boys without jeans," etc.

As I use the real world teaching materials I am impressed by the absence of boredom. Short attention span has to do with how long a child will stay with something he finds boring. Paint, water, wood, sand are open-ended materials which seem to have no beginning and no end. One does not get bored with them because they are life.

So, too, field trips became one of the most influential aspects of our program. Beach trips, light houses, ecology centers, hikes, walks about the community, watching a horse being shod, watching people doing their "work," going on hunts for shapes, bike days, going on right-left trips, shopping for needed items are all exciting learning situations which make use of the real world. From these experiences children gain not only information about their world and conceptual understanding, but also feelings about other people in the world. Invariably the Pacific Oaks group on a field trip evoked interesting and considered response from the host or guides because the children would ask real and thoughtful questions. The answers they gave to the host's questions were never stereotyped. Many people commented to me about the surprising level of interest, understanding, and creativity the group showed.

I also observed how skillful the group was in figuring out appropriate behaviors in appropriate settings. Although they never line up at Pacific Oaks because it isn't necessary (except for fire drills), they readily lined up in a bakery or at a Western Union office when it seemed appropriate to them.

Open Education Means a Chance to Move at One's Own Pace

As learning happens in an open classroom, competition is less dominant. Children see each other's likenesses and differences and tend to be highly tolerant of each other. Similarities and differences are recognized and valued as qualities of uniqueness. Because children see the many sides of each other in an open situation, there is less opportunity for labeling. Although Jim might be aggressive and rough at times, we also see him very gently bringing his little sister to school for the day. Problems seem to be kept more in perspective. That is only one part of the total person we see. Hannah is a really great authority on animals, has a great enthusiasm for school, is generous and loving, is extremely observant and excited about her world and the things in it. Learning to read is not her forte at this time, and this is not overemphasized. In an open classroom it is possible to focus not on what the child can't do but on what he can do.

The kind of competition observed has involved the child's competing with himself. "I can remember when I couldn't climb the Camel's Hump, but now I can." "Put the high jump at two and a half feet for me this time."

When learning is allowed to happen individually, then one must be able to see how all kinds of learning happen at once. The child does not naturally divide his world up into subjects. This is an adult scheme of convenience. Furthermore, there are a variety of things happening to a learner all at one time. He is reacting emotionally and intellectually, perhaps socially and cognitively, all at the same moment.

Open Education Means Varied Amounts of Structure for Each Child

Just as every child in a group is developing differently in all areas, so also each child varies in his ability to handle open structure. Foolishly, too many schools expect equal abilities here. (Actually, many free schools, because they are often attended by acting-out children, need more rather than less structure.) An environment that is safe emotionally and physically is the only one that will foster learning, I think. Often the staff has limited children in our group, has made decisions for them, has redirected or distracted their direction if it did not seem purposeful. These are areas which demand judgment from the adults in the situation.

The group came to their own conclusions about class rules, and the rules they made are few but effective:

1. Do not disturb another person's project.
2. Do not destroy materials.
3. Do not throw anything except balls.

Simultaneously they devised a fair and efficient method for cleaning up. An open classroom has specific boundaries and real structure.

A dimension of work with children is work with parents. The degree of success of a program may very well be determined by the degree of parent support. Open education is difficult for lay people to understand and accept, because they themselves spring from traditional education roots. One must think of parents as learners, also, and allow them the time and process of conceptualization it takes any learner.

Small group meetings, large group meetings, individual conferences and home visits are only some of the means of access. One must not expect total understanding or acceptance, but one hopes for an atmosphere of trust. If both parties know that the teacher is doing what she honestly feels is best for the child, then some room for discussion exists. One must be careful to include explanations of how observations are made, records are kept, routine and class rules are developed, so that what may appear to be random disorder turns out to be invisibly structured. Using the child's work as samples and describing actual incidents are ways which reassure parents that real learning is happening.

Open Education Means Pursuing In-Depth Experience

It seems to me that one of the hardest tasks for an open program is to develop depth--not to skim over experiences superficially. I think the attitude of the staff is probably the key factor here. Dorothy Cohen, in her book, *The Learning Child* (1972), states that she feels she has seen a cultural phenomenon develop in the past ten or fifteen years among seven- to eleven-year-olds. The television commercial milieu has conditioned children to expect things fast and easy. Too many simply never experience an in-depth awareness, especially if the culture sends them to dissemination model schools. Television shows them how and so do teachers. Why get involved? Let the world do it to me. What an indictment of American education and technology that is!

One must not forsake the in-depth experience in the open classroom. At Pacific Oaks most of our children have not yet been squelched or turned off, so our job is to extend and keep alive this inquiry, curiosity, and creativity. Other schools initiating an open program may have to go through a period of adjustment. Turned-off children do not turn on easily.

My teaching has given me only some answers for ensuring an in-depth program. Certainly there must be an enriched environment. No open classroom will function without many things to do in it. Because Pacific Oaks children have been exposed to much material, it is important that we extend and vary their experiences. The classic materials are not to be discarded but supplemented. Art has moved from free expression with materials to realistic observation of details and representation and modeling activities. This is a natural development which we enhance with appropriate activities. Reading material has gone into reading continued stories. The many preschool activities related to symbolic functions are turning to actual reading. Building has gone into long-term projects. Mixing colors in water has been extended into simple chemical experiments. Established readers and writers are beginning to send coded messages. Through a Eurhythmics Program free musical expression and experimentation with instruments has grown into expressing rhythm with the body and into attaching appropriate symbols to this rhythm. In every way we can, we:

1. Encourage Observation of Detail.
   Notice all the different shapes of windows in Pasadena.
   Notice the designs in a sea urchin's back.

2. Stretch an Interest.
   Nicky went to Italy. Let's find out the kinds of things they do and eat in Italy and make them. Let's do other countries, too.
   We know a lot about foods. Let's go on a food hunt. Look for food where you think it grows--some things on trees, some things on the ground, some things under the ground.

3. Encourage Alternate Pathways.
   The mice are escaping from their cage! What can we do?
   Is climbing the tree safe?
   How can you show how much you weigh? Are there other ways?
   On a field trip to a junk yard: What is this? What can you do with it? What else?

If the environment is well equipped, then, too, the staff must be well aware of their instructional goals. We know these are both short-term and long-term. I know that over a period of three years (K-1-2) most of the children should be well equipped in reading, writing, and math skills. In no way do I limit myself to a shorter time span. In this way the pressure is off me and the children. More important, I see long-range goals being fostered. Problem-solving, creative thinking, conceptual growth, self-awareness and self-confidence, ability to express one's ideas orally, pictorially, musically, and in written form are fostered. The ability to have an experience, organize one's thoughts about it, and then express these with meaning is a growth concept.

Hence, in the equipped environment, long-term and short-term goals are to be achieved and used wisely if there is a "meta-structure" to make it happen. This is often the one thing missing in open classrooms. It is the "how it works" idea. It includes the few rules, the limits, the structure, but more importantly, the attitudes. It is that spark which parents and children give to staff and staff gives to children and parents. It is that sense of purpose and love of life.

Open Education Means Experiencing a Range of Feelings for Oneself and Observing This in Others: Valuing Oneself and Others

The development of group feeling is a real component of the open classroom. An esprit de corps is gained as reaching out to others begins and grows. Helping, understanding, sharing, and being tolerant of problem areas are developments which I observed during the year. As stated earlier, if the teacher's role is to write her own curriculum, then soon the message is given to the group that we're all in this together. Adults in the situation act as models for the children. As they value each other and the children, so will the children react and grow.

Feelings are a real part of life and feeling experiences are discussed and valued. My own conviction is that as we act on materials, we develop cognitively; so also, as we experience feelings, we mature emotionally. If maturity involves getting outside of oneself, then beginning group consciousness is extremely critical.

Group feelings do not develop accidentally. The message is nonverbally given to each child in the group that all have value, that acting-out behavior makes life difficult at times, but we understand that the child certainly doesn't choose to act that way. It usually is a result of embarrassment, self-consciousness, or nervousness. We try to give each child the message that most of the time we expect a certain kind of behavior and trust that he can live up to it.

I became aware that daily class meetings, although sometimes abortive, provided an important dimension for these children. Learning to listen and to be listened to, belonging to something together, gaining fascinating information from each other, and ultimately having a sense of "we have created this unique experience and it is ours" are some of the qualities of class meeting.

A child returns from an illness and goes around giving all her classmates a hug.

A very aggressive boy tells the class we must all be especially quiet now, because Veronica has a very soft voice.

A child asks the group for ideas to handle a neighborhood problem.

Are these indicators of group feeling to you?

Taking a global view, I think open education is a real life experience. Therefore, it is a primary means of education for life. At certain times one finds specific technical needs in life which may be taught directly and efficiently. If they are sought by the learner, then the motivation itself will cause optimum use of the method, whatever it is.

Do you think there will be no thinkers produced if we educate by doing? How many of the great scholars and inventors were not products of tradional systems! Einstein and Edison are only two examples. I suggest that the key quality of personal involvement fostered by growth model/real life education is the same quality of experience a self-actualized adult feels. Such persons do not only assimilate experience; they accommodate and adapt to life. Our world no longer can afford mass-produced people.

> *The principal goal of education is to create men who are capable of doing new things, not simply repeating what other generations have done--men who are creative, inventive and discoverers. The second goal of education is to form minds which can be critical, can verify, and not accept everything they are offered. The great danger today is of slogans, collective opinions, ready-made trends of thought. We have to be able to resist individually, to criticize, to distinguish between what is proven and what is not. So we need pupils who are active, who learn early to find out by themselves, partly by their own spontaneous activity and partly through material we set up for them, who learn early to tell what is verifiable and what is simply the first idea to come to them.* (Ginsburg and Opper, 1969)

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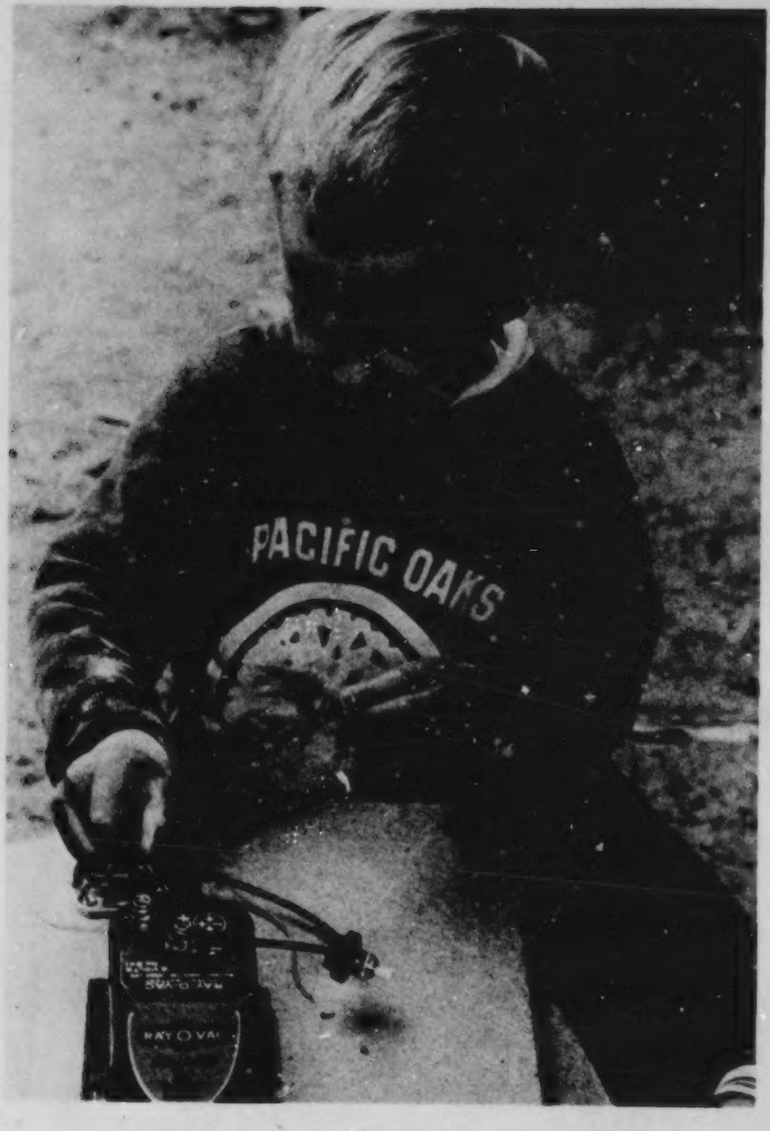
PACIFIC OAKS
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2. Planning and Communicating the Emergent Curriculum

Janet Wood and Carole Herman

Planning the Emergent Curriculum

Adventure Yard's emergent curriculum was derived from a process of observing and listening to children, evaluating and understanding a child's developmental level, and staff discussion which combined abstract ideas with concrete activities.

In traditional education, curriculum is planned outside the classroom by experts. Then the teacher implements the preplanned lessons from teachers' manuals, according to predetermined behavioral objectives. A child's growth is measured by her/his ability to perform predetermined tasks on standardized tests.

In contrast, Adventure Yard's curriculum was not preplanned by units or by the semester or year. We did not use teachers' manuals, behavioral objectives or standardized tests for planning a child's cognitive development. We did not teach someone else's curriculum. Instead our curriculum was an outgrowth of the children's interests, questions, and concerns and was geared to their developmental levels. The staff's job was to facilitate and to extend the children's interests and investigations.

In our roles as teachers, the emphasis was on the adult as an observer and facilitator of the child, rather than on the adult as the sole source of knowledge for the child. Children were allowed to ask their own questions and to make their own discoveries about the materials and situations with which they were working. In addition, and in contrast to many learning center models, every child was not expected to do every activity every day. Cognitive growth can happen via many experiences and with many materials. The staff supplied materials, observed interactions and tried to have the right question for a child when s/he reached that critical moment of discovery and movement to a new level of knowledge.

Creative materials were always available to children, although they might not be specifically set out: such things as paint, paper, glue, collage materials, clay, wood, and water. Staff gathered supplies necessary for any special art project and had that activity ready for children. Special math or reading projects were prepared. These might be based on a particular theme which was being explored or on a special interest of one or more of the children. Projects might also be based on the needs of a particular child or the introduction of something new that we felt was relevant.

When the children arrived at school, they could choose to participate in any of the activities specifically set out, or they could initiate a project of their own. At some time during the day, they were worked with individually in skill areas, which included key words, creative writing, independent reading, silent reading, phonics, vocabulary building, sorting, classifying, counting, measuring, computation, and so on. Obviously, not all these areas were covered in one day, but over a week's time most of them were.

Because ours was a constantly evolving program, it was impossible for us to say at the beginning of the year what kinds of things we would be doing during the course of the year. We began initially by having a large variety of things for children to become involved with, such as clay and a potter's wheel, macrame, collage materials, wood construction, and many more. (These were in addition to specific reading and math games and work boxes.) We found the clay and the extension of its use with the potter's wheel to be a great thing for children. They quickly learned to coordinate the speed of the wheel with their feet, while using their hands to mold the clay. They began to throw beautiful pots which were later fired. From this experience, we felt that children were learning a great variety of things experientially, including: conservation (Does the quantity change when the shape changes?), symmetry, patterning, mass, volume, weight, composition (Can I have too much or too little water for the clay to work effectively on the wheel?). Not enough can be said about the fine muscle coordination--at a perfected level--needed to throw a pot that will indeed retain its shape.

When introducing macrame, we talked about symmetry, patterns, right and left, numbers, and measuring. Children worked on individual projects, as well as on a larger group project in which adults also participated.

Since the main emphasis of our program was the authentic environment, we had many animals as a part of the program. We studied and enjoyed the birth of twenty-two baby rats, six baby rabbits, approximately seventy-five sea horses, and one baby duck. The fact that our sea horses did not survive led to much study and research to find the cause of their death. We examined fertile and non-fertile eggs that our mother duck had laid. We were surprised to find that the mother rabbit had burrowed deep in the ground where she built a nest for her young. We did not see the young until they were about six weeks old. At the closing of school, it was apparent that the mother rabbit had done this again and that she had more babies hidden away. These were cared for and loved by the children attending summer school.

We constantly listened to children to hear about their interests or areas that they wanted to explore. As a weekend family/staff outing, a large group hiked in the nearby foothills. While there, some of the children came upon a large rock in which they found small indentations. Children living in the area explained that these were rocks in which Indians of that area had ground their acorn meal.

As a result of this "find," children came to school on Monday eagerly asking questions about Indians. From that small beginning, we became involved in an Indian "unit" like none that we could have produced if the idea and interest had not come from the children. This "unit" continued on for more than six weeks and we saw an intensity of involvement and a quality of material produced that we still find unbelievable.

A brief list of some of the things we studied and did will give only a small idea of how real this study of Indians was for children:

We Studied (by use of resource materials)

- Films on Indian tribes
- Slides loaned by a parent
- Visiting the Southwest Indian Museum

We Made

- Tooled leather objects
- Braided headbands
- Bricks
- Clay pots
- Navajo fry bread
- Large totem poles
- Small totem poles
- Collages with grains
- Woven mats
- Painted rocks
- Bracelets
- Tortillas
- Kayaks and paddles

We Tried

- Sign language
- Indian stories
- Indian games
- Grinding grains
- Weaving on a loom
- Sand painting
- Painting Indian symbols
- Popping corn on an outdoor oven
- Cooking tortillas on an outdoor oven
- Bead stringing

Some additional explanation must be shared concerning one of the larger projects undertaken as part of this study of Indians. In the yard was a large carpet spool which had been brought in by one of the students. It was approximately eight feet long and one foot in diameter. It was hollow with both ends open. One of the boys spotted that tube and asked if he could have it for his project. Receiving a "yes," he quickly began work on his kayak. This project, of course, quickly caught on, and since we had a ready source of tubes, the group was soon totally engrossed in making kayaks.

The mathematics and physics used by those children in making the kayaks was amazing. They had to figure out such things as where to cut the hole. This they did themselves, with a small skill-saw that we consider part of the basic equipment needed for an open classroom. Several children decided that theirs would be a two-child kayak, and friends became partners in the project. Another problem was to figure out how they would stop up the ends of the tube so that it would not leak. There were a variety of approaches to this problem. It became a great learning experience for all children, with much discussion as to the properties of materials, how they would withstand water, how much weight they would add, whether the kayak should be painted and, if so, with what kind of paint. Interestingly enough, only one child realized that the tube would roll with someone in it, and therefore he put pontoons on his. This same child had been working earlier on making a raft, and it was his idea to use the tube for a kayak.

Once some of the kayaks were finished, we felt that they should be tested in water to check out the various theories. In the nearby Arroyo is a shallow casting pond which we felt would be a good testing ground. Since we wanted this to be a kayak-testing adventure rather than a swimming party, we told children that they would not be allowed in the kayaks and would need to find and put together other objects with a weight equivalent to their own. Such things as bricks, pieces of wood, and small logs were used. One child realized that she would be in an L-shaped sitting position when in the kayak and arranged her equivalent weight objects in that shape.

We were pleased to discover that most of the kayaks were water-tight and that the pontoons were really necessary to keep the kayak upright. There were some leaks where the nails were used to apply the pontoons, and that child returned to the yard to solve another problem.

While this Indian "unit" progressed, we saw children in various stages of involvement. Although there was a large variety of things in which to participate, not all children chose to be involved in the particular project of the day. Some projects were extended over longer periods of time, and one child might carry the project further than the other children. Many of the projects mentioned were spin-offs from the children's reading or research. We found that parents were hearing about the study at home, and they began bringing in special things they had to share with the children. We discovered that one of our families had lived for a few months on a Navajo reservation when Jeannie was a baby. They shared with us some of the precious artifacts that they had from that time. Students, parents, and children brought in valuable pot shards, arrowheads, pieces of obsidian, and many other things relevant to our study.

One of the college students working in the facilities at night had a rich background in Indian history. He became our mystery Indian and left symbol messages at night for the children to discover and decode in the morning.

Daily Staff Meetings

The Adventure Yard staff planned during two daily meetings. The first session occurred at noontime. About one-half of the staff of five or six teachers accompanied the children to lunch. The remaining staff met over lunch and began a discussion of the morning, which might have gone something like this:

> *It was a really mellow morning!*
>
> *Yes, at 10:00 I took a head count, and almost everyone was working in the yard. The clay representations were beautiful. How did that get started?*
>
> *Well, I just put out the clay, some straw, paint and some wood turnings. Kathy came first. I just began modeling and talking about alligators.* (We had just gotten some baby alligators for the yard.) *Diane had come also, and she and Kathy decided the alligators should have a place to live. I narrated as we all worked. They would revise my story as I went along.*
>
> *You had ten kids involved for most of the morning.*
>
> *All of them were really into designing habitats for the creatures they created. They really got into cooperative play when they began running out of room on the table. They began to exchange ideas and suggestions until we had a whole swamp with a continuous river running through it covering the table...*
>
> *Can we continue that activity tomorrow?*
>
> *Yes, but what about moving it to the sand area where we can build real rivers for the alligators in the sand?*
>
> *Jim wants to do bottle rockets. Can we get the stuff for that? He says he did it last year.*
>
> *I'll get the vinegar and we have soda. Ann, you were covering Shady Lane. What was happening with the bikes this morning? Doug, David and Bob were really busy.*
>
> *They were playing "Emergency." They had the kids from North Yard playing patients, and they were the "paramedics." They would rush to the little kids' aid. They really KNOW what to do. Doug said, "Careful, don't move him. We'd better check him out before."*
>
> *Maybe we should call Susan's dad. He's a paramedic and we can ask him if he can bring the paramedic van here one morning this week. Or we can go visit them.*

For about forty-five minutes we discussed activities, events, interactions, and specific children. We recorded the children's participation in activities on a daily activity chart.

We also wrote anecdotal notes in individual children's records. And, we began writing the curriculum for the next day. For example we would record:

Clay representation: swamp in the sandbox
Emergency (in Shady Lane): Dr.'s kit, call about van
Bottle rockets (get vinegar)

In discussing the extension of an activity, we employed the idea of *moderate novelty.* Moderate novelty means giving the child the next small increment of experience that allows her/him to move from one level of knowledge to the next logical level of knowledge. If the extension of the experience is too great, the child will be unable to connect the new information with her/his existing cognitive structures. The right information, however, can bring the child to a new insight into the way the world works.

We also had the flexibility in our program to allow an activity to move in the direction of a child's interests. For example, if we planned to build boats and a child found some wheels and wanted to build cars instead, we built cars. Open-ended activities flowed according to the children's interests. "Emergent curriculum" usually describes a teacher's picking up on a child's interest and then building a class unit from it, e.g., dinosaurs, Indians, etc. This kind of total interest sometimes happened in Adventure Yard. However, it was more usual for the emergent curriculum to be directly related to each child's interest or to small groups of children's interests. We did not expect the entire class to be interested in the same thing at the same time.

In addition to the activities that children suggested, the staff added activities we wished to do and experiences we felt were important to the building of cognitive concepts. We regularly included math games as a planned activity. These games provided a variety of mathematical experiences with number, classification, seriation, various number bases, one-to-one correspondence, counting, and computation. Some of the materals we used were: Tube Trading, Chip Trading, Dienes Blocks, chess, checkers, Lotto, Attribute Blocks, Shape Discrimination Tiles, and a variety of board games--school-made and purchased.

At the end of the school day, after the children had gone home and the staff had completed clean-up, we met again and continued the noontime process of discussing the day, the activities, and the children. The plan book did not reflect any of the discussion. It merely recorded the activities that were planned for the next day. It was the recording of the structure from which we worked each day. The context of the activities was carried in our heads.

From this process of observing, listening, discussing, and evaluating, Adventure Yard's curriculum emerged.

Record Keeping

Vital to a program of this kind is the constant record keeping that goes on. Not only was it necessary to have records in order to evaluate where a child was at the end of the semester, but it was even more important to know where s/he was from day to day. This daily knowledge was important for planning a program for the individual child. It was also necessary for students in the program so that they would be able to assess quickly what a child had been working on or had finished. This was especially valuable for those students who were not in the group every day. Additionally, no staff member was with the group for the entire day continuously, and, even if s/he were, it would be impossible to know what each child had done over a complete day without keeping records.

We had records that were done on a daily basis, as well as those done on a weekly basis. For each day, there was a daily activities sheet. On this sheet were listed activities planned for the day. It also often included particular children that needed special attention in a certain area. The morning staff would check that sheet when they arrived in the morning to see what activities needed to be set out and what supplies should be gathered; at times they would make a choice as to which activity they wanted to supervise. When the afternoon team teacher arrived for the day, she would write additional instructions for the afternoon staff, indicating what things were to be continued into the afternoon, what new things to set up, and which children needed attention in specific areas. At the end of the day, all staff were encouraged to write comments on the back of the daily sheet. These comments could include additional supplies that needed to be brought in the following day, what children wanted to continue a project, how the project had succeeded or failed, and/or suggestions for its improvement or change for another day.

An additional daily sheet was posted on which staff were asked to indicate what children were involved in certain projects. These usually included such things as interest trips, games, puzzles, art activities, building activities, and special projects. In fact, this list included any things that were not included in the specific skill areas of math or reading. This was a very informal chart on which staff would simply jot down an activity and list children's names underneath the activity.

Posted on a weekly basis was a chart listing all children's names and recording math and reading activities for each child. On it were indicated the days that a child had been worked with in math, phonics, vocabulary building, individual reading, and work boxes (which included their key words and creative writing).

Probably the most vital part of the record keeping process is the anecdotal record kept on each child. All staff members write in these record books. Some writing was done each day on children, although not all children were covered on each day. These records included such things as how a child handled her/himself in a new activity, how s/he was able to verbalize her/his feelings, how s/he related with particular children or staff members, how s/he reacted to leaving the yard for a trip, and many, many more things about that child. Also included were writings about the home visits, parent conferences that were held during the year, and the six-weeks' summary. If any informal testing in a given area was done, it would be recorded anecdotally in the section for that child.

A chart was kept on which all books read by a child were listed. One could very quickly know where a child was in his reading by looking at the chart and being familiar with the books.

All these records, as mentioned, were vital to the coordinated planning for, and evaluation of, children in the group. These were specifically used as reference points for staff when having parent conferences and were resource material when writing the developmental summaries at the end of the school year.

Communicating With Parents

In Adventure Yard's program, we did not use standard measurement devices or scales to project a child's progress. We did not use conventional letter grades or report cards. We did not diagnose and prescribe for children in, for example, the following manner:

> *Jim's reading ability tested out at 1:1. He should be reading at 1:6 at least. We are prescribing a program of study using the Rainbow Series. That should put him at level 1:5 by January, if he really applies himself.*

Instead, we looked at each child in the context of four years' growth (kindergarten through third grade). We observed her/his use of materials, her/his problem-solving abilities, her/his ability to hold onto ideas and to abstract her/his own hypotheses, and her/his socialization processes and peer relationships. Using this information on our longer time-line, we evaluated a child's growth and development cognitively, socially and affectively.

The staff was able to assimilate all this information about each child and to fit it into the total picture of child, yard, and curriculum. The intimate relationship of child, teacher, and program made this possible.

Parents, however, got only bits and pieces of the total picture--rather like pieces in a jigsaw, with parents having only a few pieces and teachers having the rest. In order to build trust and increase understanding, parents needed more of the pieces. Some form of continuous communication seemed essential.

Adventure Yard teachers have always held semi-annual, in-depth parent conferences. Teachers were available for daily, informal chats "at the gate." We held parent meetings and orientations. But none of these methods provided a continuity of contact with the whole program. Nor did they speak to some of the questions parents had but did not ask. I* wanted to find a way to deal with some of the questions about open-structured methods in our non-traditional setting--questions such as:

---

*Janet Wood

How does a teacher explain the value of activities like potions, basketball, and sand/water?

How can a teacher talk about theory without overwhelming parents with educational jargon and taking a heavy "expert" role?

How can a teacher reduce parents' anxiety about their school-age children who appear to only PLAY at school?

What information do parents need to help them feel more comfortable in their choice of an alternative method of schooling for their children?

A weekly newsletter, dealing just with the emergent curriculum and day-to-day activities in the yard, might bridge the gap. It might fill in some of the missing pieces and would be more concrete than a conversation. Preparation to write the letter would also keep me close to the daily happenings, in the sense that I would have to have a feeling for the kinds of questions parents might have as well as know what activities parents would want additional information about.

I began writing the newsletters, not knowing whether they would be weekly or not. During the fall semester, they were published almost weekly. There were more pressures on my time in the spring, so the frequency decreased, but usually a letter was sent home every two weeks.

These newsletters did not represent the totality of the Pacific Oaks Primary Program--only a small part of it. I wrote about the things that interested me and about the things I thought might be of interest to parents. I included discussions of activities I thought parents had anxieties about. I was the reporter, the editor, and the publisher! Another teacher might have chosen an entirely different set of activities and happenings to communicate. Examples of the newsletters, with annotations, follow:

NEWSLETTER #2 *September 26, 1975*

Dear Adventure Yard People,

Water, water everywhere.....that was the yard this week. (Note #2/1, below)

The lakes and rivers changed and grew, were dammed and overflowed. There were long discussions about water flow, damming methods and effective flood control. The basic flow was rechanneled, and floods were controlled by using complex levees of bricks, wood and sand. (Note #2/2, below)

The erosive qualities of water were explored by changing the force of the water flow. It was discovered that a volcano could be constructed from damp sand. When a hose was buried beneath the mound, the volcano rose, pulsated, cracked and finally erupted, spilling a lava flow that rivaled Hawaii's best.

Older or experienced children helped other children understand the processes and complexities of the work by describing what work was needed and how to build dams. We all shared in the excitement of the 11:00 (a.m.) *deluge. We predicted when the water would finally break the dams and the direction of the water flow.* (Note #2/3, below)

Boats were built for use in the lakes. The boats were carried to the Arroyo at lunch and used in the casting pond. It was decided that air pockets helped to keep the boats afloat and that the boats moved swiftly because portions of the crafts acted like sails. (activity chart #2/4, below)

Today, we're all going swimming. We've really been damp for days.....

Many other things happened as well. The qualities of objects that sink or float were explored by first graders and at the water table.

Candle-making is always an engaging activity. The transformation process of melting and hardening wax continues to interest children and adults alike. (Note #2/5, below)

"Puka" necklaces and other bead-stringing used small muscles and eye-hand coordination.

In spite of the heat--102° on Wednesday--we've had an active and productive week.

An observation by Kevin at the Arroyo: "When I was putting some trash in the trash can I noticed the ants going up and down. They looked like they were reading Japanese."

Jan & Staff

Annotations to letter #2--September 26, 1975

#2/1: The "Water, water everywhere..." was the beginning of a continuing interest in the properties of sand and water. Variation on this theme continued throughout the year. On April 10, 1976, seven children (ages five through nine) were again exploring volcano building, but the exploration had grown so that there was now a huge mountain covering about one-third of the sand area.

#2/2: Sand play was also one of those activities which parents seemed uncomfortable with. The academics of sand and water are not obvious. Writing about this activity gave it special emphasis and conveyed that we saw this as valuable work and legitimate learning.

#2/3: Sand play is one activity in which the value of vertical grouping can be seen. This was an example of our helping environment in which children are teachers, too.

Chart #2/4: Activity--Sand and Boats

	K		1		2		3	
	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G
M	1						1	
T			3	2	2		2	
W	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Th	1	3	2		2		4	
F		2	4	1	3		4	

Note: Some children participated on more than one day.

Boys: 29
Girls: 8
Total for week: 37

#2/5: Activities that involve transformations (liquid to solid, dry to wet, hard to soft, etc.) are particularly interesting and involving. Wax, sand and water, oobleck, and potions are activities of this sort, and these are activities that children often requested.

NEWSLETTER #3 *October 4, 1975*

Dear Adventure Yard Persons,

We've built an Activity Box! And each day children put in their ideas for activities. We add teachers' interests, ideas and experiences. From this the daily curriculum emerges. (Note #3/1, below)

O-o-Oobleck came from an activity box suggestion. It oozed and dripped from our hands, in a rainbow of color. This simple mixture of cornstarch and water provided intensive investigation into the physical properties of matter. "Hey, look at the worms"..."It looks like liquid, but touch it. TOUCH IT!" The oobleck feels solid and resistant. Tip the container and it pours. Squeeze it and it becomes a seemingly dry, rock-like mass. But, with a little shake, it's transformed to a liquid. Making oobleck pudding for snack extended our knowledge of the material, as heat transformed it in still another way.

The dam and water system is being revamped. Rerouting the channel to run under the swings became a major construction project. An old holey pipe was uncovered and the stream of water disappeared into it. We have searched the yard but we haven't found an exiting place. (Note #3/2, below)

To further our knowledge of dam-building methods, some of us went on a field trip to Devil's Gate Dam and Santa Anita Dam. We examined the dams from the top and the bottom, and discussed their functions of conservation and flood control. It was observed that "We have our own flood *control system! Under the swings...the hole, ya know!"*

Dyeing processes are being explored. Natural dyes were brewed from marigolds and tea. The steaming kettles inspired a communal vegetable soup for snack. Tie-dyeing and sun-dyeing are going on, providing many opportunities to explore changes through color and design.

Mathematical concepts were investigated in woodturning sculpture. One-to-one correspondence, symmetry, classification of objects, and spatial relations are some of the concepts used in the making of these constructions. (Note #3/3, below)

We learn together, through our involvement in the process...

Jan & Staff

Annotations to letter #3--October 4, 1975

#3/1: More input for the emergent curriculum. The activity box was a teacher's idea. The children were involved in the construction of the box. The box was a concrete way to implement an abstract idea.

Including children's ideas and interests was essential to the curriculum. Teachers listened and observed and attempted to structure experiences that were geared to the children's interests and needs. Having the activity box to focus on as a receptacle for the children's ideas (written down by them or us) increased our awareness of the process of emergent curriculum.

#3/2: Creating an authentic environment is one of the basic ideas of the program. Using real materials in real life settings, or seeing the real thing, were experiences we considered necessary to the child's developmental process. The dam visit was a teacher's idea for extending the activity in the sand area. It provided authenticity for the curiosity generated by the children's explorations and discoveries. Five boys who were especially involved in the dam building in the sandbox made the trip to the dams.

#3/3: Pacific Oaks children create sculptures with wood turnings from their first preschool experience on. These sculptures are beautiful and fanciful--geometric towers or structures of complex shape, color, and design. Listing the possible cognitive aspects demonstrated how these sculptures fit into the curriculum and, hopefully, moved this activity from the realm of "play" to the realm of "work" in the parents' minds.

NEWSLETTER #4 *October 10, 1975*

Dear Adventure Yard People,

"Bup, bup, bup! Boil, Boil, bubble, bubble!" The magic potion foams out onto the table. Mixing potions is an engrossing activity. We began with edible white compounds and clear liquids. With our tongues, our noses, and other senses, we tried to determine whether a substance was sugar, salt, flour, soda, or baking powder, and whether a liquid was vinegar, water, soda water, extract, or quinine. By experimentation, effervescent, gaseous mixtures were discovered. One measure of success was how high the top popped of the pill bottle; another was the quantity of fizz and foam. Measuring spoons provided experience with standard measurement and allowed children to duplicate their creations. The interaction of common substances used in making "potions" is a basis of the knowledge of chemistry.

A clubhouse (or fort--it's been both) has been under construction for several weeks. It has become a complex structure with a front door, a back door and a roof door. The back yard has a picket fence, and a flower garden is planned. The house has been painted yellow and brown. It has a "grassy" roof, running water, and is called "The Rivieros." The building has provided many opportunities for problem solving: putting on hinges, placement of windows, cutting wood to fit a particular space, compromising to suit all those involved. Construction also affords endless opportunities to deal with mathematical concepts such as making a whole out of parts, estimation, measurement, experience with shapes and angles. (Note #4/1, below)

Sunny Thursday was perfect for Bike Day. We used skates, bicycles, big wheels, Cheetahs, skateboards, tricycles, and Cathy's golden "boat" to stretch our muscles. We paused long enough between laps to do key words, write in journals, read and complete our usual daily tasks. Individual tasks helped us focus on the environment. "How many animals can you see from this spot?" "What can you hear if you're very quiet?" "Can you count the palm trees in Lacey Park?" We found caterpillars and grubs, saw squirrels and birds, examined pods and leaves, smelled the flowers, and heard the wind. (Note #4/2, below)

Stories from Lacey Park:

Ted's Story with Jan

Ted stood looking and touching an evergreen tree.
"I think all the leaves that are light are
mommies and the dark ones are daddies."
I asked:
"Are there any seeds on the dark ones?"
He answered:
"Yea, there are seeds on the dark ones. I
guess they're all mommies."
I split a fruit from a strawberry tree open.
"What does it look like inside, Ted?"
"Like it has acid in it."
"How can you tell?"
"Cause it looks like an orange."

Tanya's Place at Lacey Park

I see some leaves
I see some trees
I see some dirt
I see some rocks
I see a mosquito
I see some big rocks
What if I lived here?
What if somebody came out of
    that thing over there?
I see some spider webs
I see some spiders
I see a little bit of dirt
I see some sand over there
I see the tree
    that's leaning over
I see some sticks
Cold and hot
    Wind
    Leaves
    Dirt
    Sand
    Swings
    Big wheels
    Skateboards
    Tricycles
    Cheetahs

John: Things I Think About

Things I thought
    of riding bikes in Lacey Park.
Cracks in the roads.
Barks on the trees and how they look
    the same, and how they look
    different.
How water would look if it came
    running down the paths, streets.
Designs it would make:
    how it would look pretty
    and how it would look ugly.

Ricky:

The road is rough and dirty. It has grass and dirty leaves. It has bikes and cars running over it all the time, and skateboards too, and people walking on it. Sometimes the water truck comes and wets the road up, and then people cause a skid and slide and skid and slide. And wheelchairs rolling over it.

Robin:

Fresh air and sun are my favorite things. Oh yes, fresh air and sun.

Trees

I love trees.
We can sit in the shade and have picnics and stuff.
                I love fresh eggs and ham.
I love my mommy. Oh, yes indeed,

Bump da da dump, dump, dump, dump,
I love my mommy and yes you say.

Jan & Staff

Annotations to newsletter #4--October 10, 1975

#4/1: Clubhouses (forts): This was the variation on a theme we saw all year--children creating their own exclusive space. Peer group relationships were evident in these activities as children worked cooperatively to create their own places. Often older children initiated clubhouses. They appeared to have more knowledge about just how to create a space for themselves. Their construction was complicated, and they used building techniques involving hammering, sawing, roofing, electrical wiring, and water systems. Younger children (K and 1) created their own spaces, but usually their activity involved moving things into an existing building, such as the playhouse, or walling the loft with pillows for privacy.

#4/2: Bike Day was requested by a child. This is one of the methods we use to learn in other environments, outside of our school.

In doing the newsletters, I learned that I wrote fairly easily. I composed most of the letters in my head while driving home on Wednesday and Thursday afternoons. I wanted to focus on those activities which were the most controversial, "play"-like, or educationally questionable, such as basketball, potions, clubhouses, sand and water, etc. Often I spent most of the time required to write the letter poring over reference books, particularly *Piaget in the Classroom, The Open Classroom Reader, The Psychology of the Child, The Teaching of Young Children, Nuffield Math Series,* and others. The reference books helped me to decide just what I wanted to say about the educational value of the activity and to choose just the right words to say it. This was a valuable part of the process, as it really kept me focused and caused me to ask myself some hard questions:

> *Why should Jimmy be allowed to play basketball every day, especially when his father wants him to do more "academics?"*
>
> *What are children experiencing cognitively as they are swinging on the structures like Tarzan?*
>
> *Potions are fun, but what else is going on?*
>
> *Oobleck again! What is it about that stuff that children continue to be fascinated by?*

In response to a questionnaire asking for evaluations of the newsletter, a parent said, "Sometimes descriptions of what children are getting out of an activity might be stretching it a bit." That may be, but I always wrote about only those activities whose cognitive value I felt I had read and thought about in depth. I wanted to be sure I understood what the cognitive possibilities were for a child as s/he was exploring a material or an activity. I had no way of knowing for sure if a child was making the cognitive connections or going through the processes that might be inherent in the materials and the activities. But I do know that the children in the primary program have been seen to develop extraordinary problem-solving skills and understand mathematical concepts in greater depth than do other children. (See "What Happens Next? A Follow-Up Study" by Rubendall, Chapter 3.)

Producing an almost-weekly newsletter kept me close to the curriculum. I listened to children's interactions and observed their processes very closely. In staff discussions, practicum teachers brought up examples and anecdotes about processes they had observed. It was a continuous clarifying process, and I discovered I could successfully write about an open-structured classroom curriculum and the theories behind the activities.

The community I wrote to learned from and valued this means of communication and, most importantly, parents found the newsletters an important bridge between a child's school life and home life.

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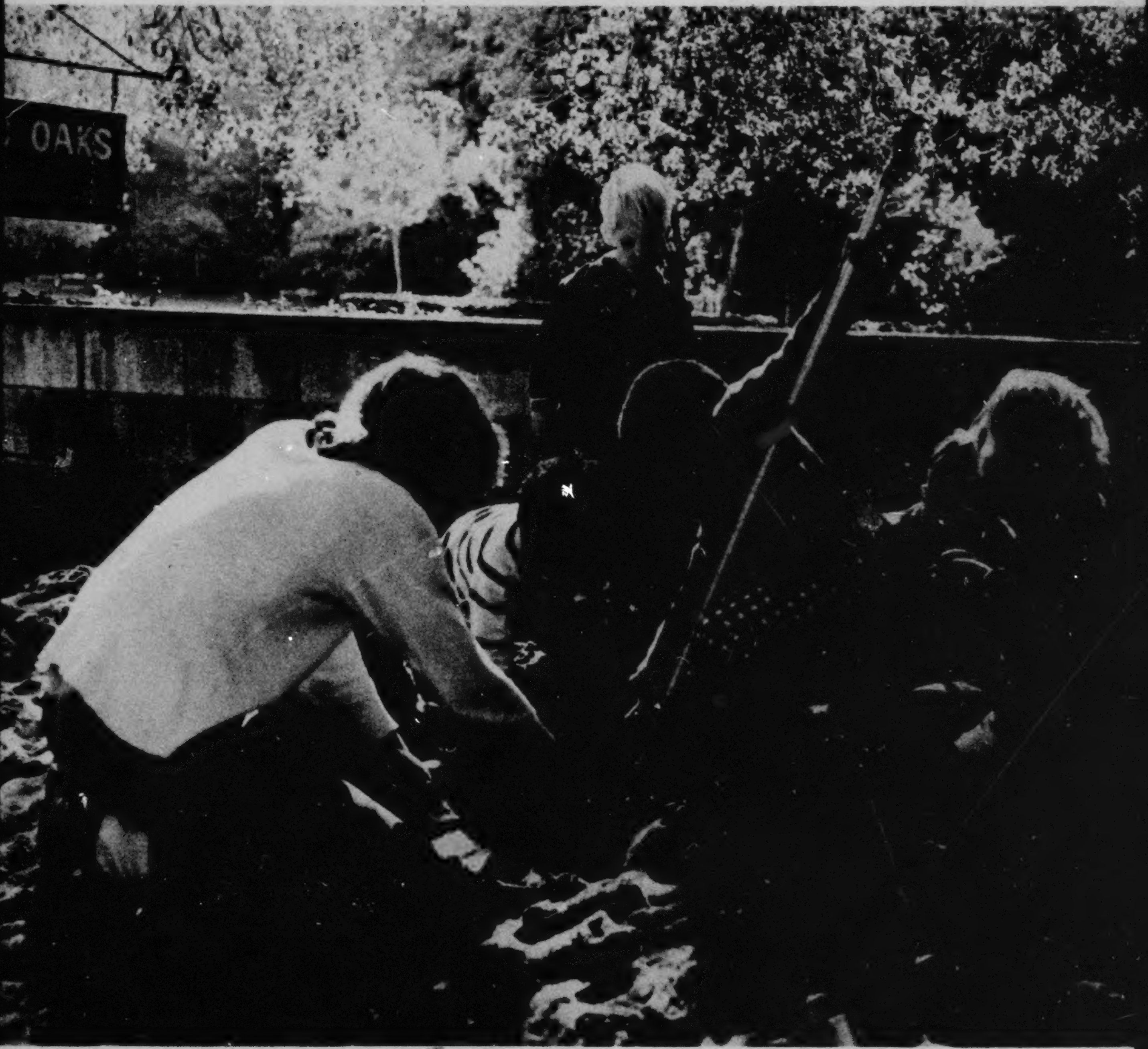

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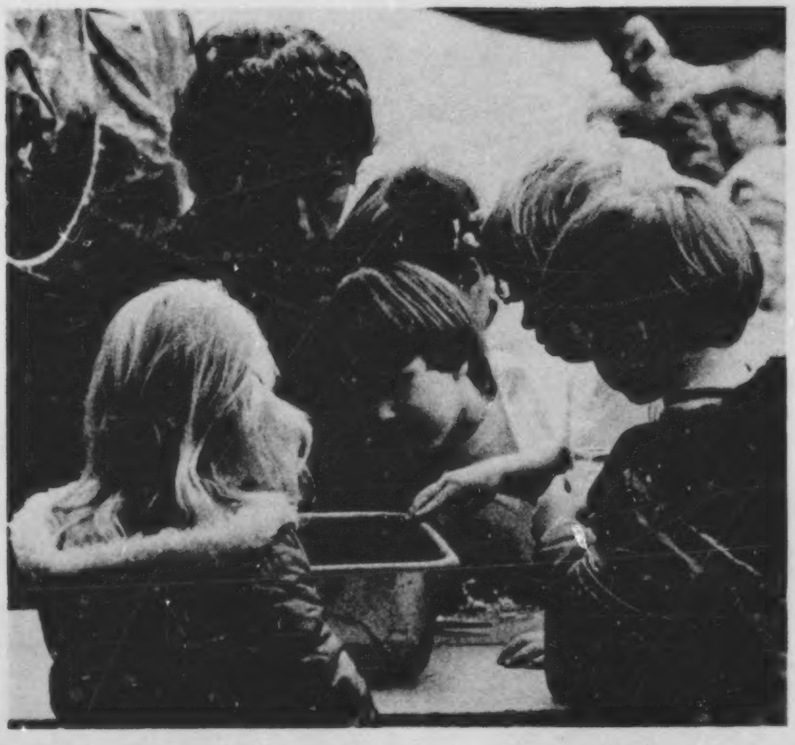

3. What Happens Next? A Follow-Up Study

Ann Rubendall

Time and again when people visit open classrooms, the repeated query seems to be: How will these children fit into and perform in other types of school situations? As one of the parents involved in the Pacific Oaks kindergarten-primary group from its beginning, I shared some of these concerns as well as an underlying faith in the program's validity. Therefore, in consultation with Doris Smith, the group's teacher, I designed a three-year follow-up study to assess the transition of children who have attended the Pacific Oaks primary group and then gone on to other settings.

All children in the study had participated in the Pacific Oaks primary program for at least two years and had left it at the end of second or third grade. The majority (about seventy per cent each year) went on to traditional public schools, with a smaller number moving into open classrooms in public schools and into public and private alternative schools.

Ten children were followed during the first year of the study (1974-75). Nine of these were in the second-year study as well, together with six more children in their first year of transition. The third-year study population included the nine children now in their third year of transition, the six from the second year, and an additional thirteen children in their first transitional year, for a total of twenty-eight. About half the children were girls and half were boys.

The follow-up study utilized classroom observations, questionnaires, interviews, and self-esteem ratings (Coopersmith, 1967). For the first two years, the principal data collection instrument was a written questionnaire designed to cover major areas in an overview of each child's adjustment to the new school setting. Open-ended questions were used, to provide a more individualized and in-depth approach than a checklist or short-answer form. Both parents and teachers responded to the questionnaire at three separate times during the school year. The information gathered by this multi-dimensional approach was combined in an individual profile for each child.

Generalization of Findings (First Two Years)

The open-ended questionnaire allowed much freedom to volunteer information that seemed outstanding in each individual case. The fact that an item was not mentioned by some parents and teachers does not necessarily mean that this characteristic was not present, but only that it may not have seemed pertinent to mention at the time. The following generalizations are ordered by category, but not by importance:

Skills

1. There seemed to be a wide range of academic achievement in scholastic areas, both while at Pacific Oaks and in the new school situations. Pacific Oaks staff predictions and anticipations showed an awareness of the wide scale of individual differences represented within the group, and this seemed to be borne out through standardized tests and informal teacher descriptions at the new schools.
2. Good command in use of oral language skills, timing, and self-expression were mentioned as strong points by two-thirds of the new teachers and several parents.
3. Creativity through written language skills was mentioned by several teachers as a positive aspect.
4. Understanding of number concepts seemed to be an area of particular strength, even if not necessarily combined with speed in mathematical operations. It was commented upon by nearly all parents and half the teachers.
5. Reading skills seemed to fall into the categories of above, at, and below grade level, with some reading test scores being lower than indicated by the more informal assessments or projections.

Social and Emotional Adjustment

6. The ability of the children to adjust to new situations was regarded highly and commented upon by all teachers and half the parents.

7. Children's general adjustment to the new settings, more traditional guidelines, and teacher expectations was more successful and easier than expected, as mentioned by more than half the parents and a few teachers. A few parents felt that the adjustment to the new situation was difficult.

8. Showing social concern, maturity, poise, and being a helpful member of the group were qualities commented upon by most teachers positively and two teachers negatively.

9. Tendency to show self-confidence and emotional stability was mentioned as a strong point by all the teachers and half the parents.

10. The ability to work independently or as part of a group was brought out in many teacher and parent comments.

11. Expression of one's own deep feelings and the ability to "tune in" to other people's emotions were commented upon in more than one case.

Adaptation to School

12. There was no evidence of rebellion against authority.

13. Courteous and cooperative behavior was described by half the teachers.

14. High motivation, setting a high standard of accomplishment for oneself and an ability to follow through were pointed out by both teachers and parents.

15. Dealing with daily routines and making good use of time were positively commented upon by all teachers and half the parents.

16. Conscientiousness and finishing assignments were mentioned by most of the teachers and several parents.

17. Showing a general level of tolerance to disturbances in the classroom environment, such as disruption by other children, noise, or a critical teacher, was mentioned as a positive aspect of adaptation.

18. Half the parents commented on children's attitudes toward school changing from that of real anticipation to acceptance (recess and lunch times being favorite times while at school).

19. Parent involvement during the transition year varied in the amount of time volunteered by individual families, but two-thirds of the families did participate as volunteers in the new schools.

Self-Esteem Ratings

20. Self-esteem ratings clearly tended toward the positive range. Distribution of the scores on the Self-Esteem Inventory (S.E.I.--Form B) fell in the interquartile range, indicating medium self-esteem, and the upper quartile range, indicating high self-esteem. Of all the children's scores, only one score fell below the fiftieth percentile.

21. The mean score for the S.E.I. was 73.6 (on a scale of 1 to 100).

22. The mean score for the S.E.B. rating by parents was 78 and by teachers 85.

Specific Areas of Difficulty Shown by the Follow-Up

Although most of the comments and suggestions to eliminate difficulties were of an individual nature, there were some areas in which repetition seemed to occur. These areas were the following:

1. A need for children to become more competent in cursive writing and in the ability to produce neater, faster work with a better standard of handwriting was mentioned by half the teachers and parents.
2. A need for greater facility with written language pertaining to spelling, grammar, and length of written stories was commented upon by one teacher and several parents.
3. A need for more emphasis on word attack skills and phonics was expressed by a few teachers and parents.
4. A need for some exposure to workbooks was mentioned.
5. For a few children who had been referred by Pacific Oaks staff for special testing/tutoring, the timing of the referral was questioned.

Third Year: Control Group Study

During the third year of the study, a new data collection procedure was utilized. A questionnaire was developed with sixty short-answer items divided into ten major categories. These categories were derived from the strengths and weaknesses of children, which had been repeatedly identified through the open-ended techniques used during the first two years of the study. The categories were:

Adult Relationships
Peer Relationships
Group Relationships/Cooperativeness
Self-Confidence/Self-Esteem
Independence/Autonomy
Adaptability/Flexibility
Empathy/Social Concern
Approaches to Work
Creativity
Basic Skills

Items on the questionnaire were listed not by category but in random order. They were presented in this form:

1. Seems comfortable around adults

____ Always ____ Usually ____ Sometimes ____ Seldom ____ Never

2. Is listened to by other children

etc.

This questionnaire made it possible to compare teachers' ratings of children in the follow-up group with their ratings of a control group of children. Each participating teacher was asked to select at random two children in the class who were of the same age and sex as the child being studied. The teacher rated these children anonymously on the questionnaire. Ratings were made once, during the second half of the 1976-77 school year.

The data analysis compared the per-child average ratings of the follow-up group with the ratings for the control group, on each questionnaire item. It is interesting to note that of the children participating in the follow-up study, one child was considered a candidate for special education, one child had a visual handicap, and one had a physical disability.

Adult Relationships

The items in this category made reference to positive relationships with the teacher and student teacher, being comfortable around adults, ability to accept evaluation by adults, being outgoing to classroom visitors, and asking pertinent questions on field trips. On all items, the per-child average for the follow-up group was the same or higher than that of the control group.

Peer Relationships

These items included organizing group activities, being listened to by peers, having several good friends, enjoying talking to and working with peers, helping other children with tasks, and being involved in group and independent activities with equal ease. The per-child average for the follow-up group was the same or higher than that of the control group.

Group Relationships/Cooperativeness

These items included following directions, responding to suggestions of others, expressing opinions and making suggestions in group situations, listening to others, showing social concern and trying to be a cooperative group member, and sharing materials and taking turns. On all six items, especially the last two, the per-child average for the follow-up group was considerably higher than that of the control group.

Self-Confidence/Self-Esteem

On those items dealing with ability to be either leader or follower, expressing a strong sense of what one wanted to do, being willing to take on new tasks, participating in discussions, and perseverance, follow-up children rated the same or higher than control group children, with the most notable difference on the item regarding the expression of a strong sense of what one wanted to do. On one item--readily expressing one's feelings--follow-up children rated slightly lower than control group children.

Independence/Autonomy

On items dealing with problem-solving and speaking out on issues even when representing a minority point of view, follow-up children rated higher than the control group. On the items dealing with enjoying working alone, setting one's own standards for accomplishment, suggesting new activities to the teacher, and never being at a loss for something to do, follow-up children rated the same or below children in the control group.

In this category, when scores for those follow-up children in their third year of transition were analyzed separately, they were found to be consistently higher than those of control group children.

Adaptability/Flexibility

This category included ratings for meeting new people easily, moving into new situations with ease, choosing new activities rather than familiar ones, using materials in innovative ways, accepting change of plans with ease, and allowing one's curiosity to lead one from activity to activity. The ratings for children in the follow-up study were the same or slightly below those for children in the control group.

Empathy/Social Concern

These items included paying attention to and understanding the feelings of others, showing compassion, being concerned for the rights of others, and commenting on how others might feel in a situation. On most items, follow-up children were rated higher than control group children. On one item--comforting peers who are upset--ratings were the same.

Approaches to Work

Follow-up children rated higher than the control group on items dealing with carrying through on a project for an extended period of time, showing more concern for finishing a task well than for finishing it quickly, and being very observant. They rated the same or lower on working well under time pressure, involvement in hobbies, and choosing reading as a spare-time activity.

Creativity

Items referred to a sense of humor, seeing different solutions to problems, asking questions to extend one's understanding, and having a lot of new ideas. Follow-up children were rated the same or higher than control group children. On making up stories and plays, working with words, and trying out many possibilities, they were rated lower. However, when the ratings of children in the third year of transition were analyzed separately, they proved consistently higher than those of the control group.

Basic Skills

On items concerning reading well and with comprehension, basic math concepts, and grammar and punctuation, ratings for the follow-up group were the same as those for the control group. On spelling, handwriting, and test-taking skills, the follow-up children were rated lower. Ratings for children in the third year of transition were substantially higher than those in the entire follow-up group in the areas of basic math concepts and test-taking skills.

Comment on Findings (Third Year)

Compared with the total ratings for the follow-up group, those children who were in their third year of transition were rated the same or higher on forty-one of the sixty items. One might draw the conclusion that once the adjustment period was bridged, there was a definite rise in teacher ratings and child performance.

Parents as well as teachers responded to the questionnaire. Approximately half the teacher ratings were the same or higher than parents' ratings of their children. Parent expectations seemed quite high in these families.

Some of the findings were unexpected. For example, in the area of Self-Confidence/Self-Esteem, a breakdown of the follow-up group by first, second, and third year of transition showed that while children in the second transition year rated consistently higher than control group children on every item, those in both the first and third transition years tended to rate the same or lower than the control group. Were the outward appearances of self-esteem, as rated by teachers, merely extensions of how well a child fit into the "system?" By the third year, did children feel less need to go along with expectations? Why was it that the children from Pacific Oaks rated notably lower on the item "Freely expresses feelings?" One wonders if the children merely thought that the expression of their feelings at school was not acceptable or appropriate. The higher parent ratings on this item would suggest that this was so, especially since, in general, parents tended to rate their children lower than the teachers did.

Parents who had chosen the Pacific Oaks program for their children and who valued many aspects of it nevertheless expressed anxiety: "Will it handicap them for the next stage of their schooling?" For the most part, the study showed that there was little academic slippage for children moving from an active, open type of education to more traditional classrooms, in spite of the relatively smaller amount of time spent on basic skills practice in the open setting.

The most consistent finding in this follow-up study was in the area of interpersonal relationships. In the rating areas of Group Relationships/Cooperativeness, Peer Relationships, Adult Relationships, and Empathy/Social Concern, the children who had been to Pacific Oaks were functioning with notable success in the more traditional classrooms.

Conclusions

This study appears to indicate that the Piaget-derived curriculum framework used in the Pacific Oaks kindergarten-primary group did develop the vital socioemotional elements which establish the climate for cognitive processes and moral values. This framework not only provided a favorable environment for most of the children at Pacific Oaks, but also seemed to have a positive influence on their attitudes and performance in the new and often more structured, content-learning-oriented situations.

Kamii describes Piaget's ideas about the necessity of socioemotional framework:

> *The relationship between cognition and affectivity for him is that the latter provides the energy that makes intelligence function...Therefore according to Piaget, affectivity can accelerate, retard or block cognitive development as can be seen in the student who gets excited or discouraged in class...Socioemotional objectives are thus important not only in themselves but also essential elements for the child's cognitive development.* (Kamii, 1973, p. 213)

These socioemotional objectives include the areas of peer relationships, the respect for feelings, ideas, and the rights of others, child-adult relationships such as establishing cooperation, one's own controls of behavior and independent decision-making, attitudes toward learning such as taking initiative, actively exploring, valuing oneself and one's own ideas, and fostering divergent thinking. Within the realm of socioemotional objectives, there would also be included the development of such moral values as conscientiousness and inner discipline.

> *Autonomous and inner discipline can exist in a class only to the extent that the work enlists the major part of the child's spontaneous initiative and activity...It is therefore not wasting a child's time to let him acquire by himself the habit of work and of inner discipline. In the moral as in the intellectual domain we really possess only what we have conquered by ourselves. And if a child is to achieve a desire for work and the habit of making efforts, we must*

> *take his interests and the special laws of his activity into account, and we must not impose upon him from the first a system of methods and ways too much like our own.* (Piaget, 1965, p. 364)

Such an approach puts to use the cooperative spirit in which children's purpose, goals, and thinking are valued. It recognizes that we are the models who influence our children, and through them, man's tomorrow.

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4. Feelings: An Integral Part of the Curriculum

Mary E.D. Scudder

When you are a teacher faced with a classroom of twenty-five to thirty children, what takes place in this classroom is your responsibility. You want to be a good teacher. We all do--it's important to our own self-esteem and self-image. But all those young people bring with them a multiplicity of human problems, which are more important to them than what you have in your plan book. As a result, the issue of control rapidly arises.

A disciplined, quiet classroom feeds into the public's image of "Teacher" with her well-organized schedule. The teacher is expected to be the authority figure, possessing model behavior her pupils would do well to emulate. However, teachers--no less than children--have human problems. Teachers need what every other human being needs--support, help, and affection.

Sally's mother received a note from Sally's teacher which said that Sally had been hurting smaller children on the playground every morning.

> *...I have explained to her that this behavior must stop. Will you please be sure this does not happen again?*
>
> *Miss Paul*

Miss Paul was having a very difficult time because the other teachers were blaming her for Sally's disruptive behavior. All the adults involved were primarily concerned with control, discipline, and punitive action. When Sally's behavior continued over a period of several months, other teachers made Miss Paul feel inadequate and unable to cope. She resorted to blaming someone else--first the child, then the parent.

Sally had been in my group the previous year, and her mother called to tell me what was happening. I was able to relate differently to the problem because my emphasis is first on *meeting needs*, rather than on controlling behavior. Why is Sally feeling so unhappy or frightened on the playground? When children resort to bullying or beating-up smaller people, they are usually experiencing real fear or feeling awfully unhappy about themselves.

Sally's mother and I talked for a long time about children's fears and the need for defense mechanisms (Ginott, 1965, 1969). In later conversation with Sally, the mother was able to help Sally put her anxieties into words, and at the same time, to let her know that she understood and accepted her fears.

> Mother: *It must be kind of scary to walk through that gate all alone into a yard full of kids you don't really know.*
> Sally: *Ya...and I don't get any teacher till the bell rings.*

Sally had to hurt someone else in order to feel safe, adequate, and big enough to cope. Yet Miss Paul's experience and reactions were somewhat similar. Unable to control Sally, she laid the problem on the parent--who then began to question what *she* was doing, as a parent. The burden of guilt is a destructive, useless weight, which drags a person down and prevents him from exploring constructive, rewarding relationships. Sally's mother went through the unpleasant experience of "I have a bad kid, so I must be a bad parent." Negative thinking can become a pattern, and this pattern is contagious, particularly to other family members.

Both parents, Sally, and Miss Paul could have learned useful problem-solving techniques, had there been different coping mechanisms built into the structure of their school. If the five teachers involved--Miss Paul, two first grade teachers, and two kindergarten teachers--had had a trusting relationship with each other, they would have been able to explore the many facets of Sally's defenses.

A child may be unhappy, scared, or wrestling with nebulous anxiety. To compensate, his behavior can become aggressive, or he may be disagreeable, grouchy, sullen, or morose. These ways of coping become a drain on the teacher, the peer group, and the family. Sooner or later a label is attached to the child and he begins to feel that way about himself. Although it is possible to control his behavior through punitive measures, such as isolation, the pattern is likely to repeat itself daily. When you build *the meeting of individual needs* into the structure, it is possible to encounter the child in terms of where he *is*, rather than the teacher's preconceived idea of where he *ought* to be.

When children are helped to look at their own feelings honestly, these feelings will change, and new, rewarding relationships are formed.

> Jeff: (Sitting on swing next to Geordy. Both boys have synchronized their pumping. They come toward me together, legs reaching out.) *Molly, me and Geordy are friends now. Know why? Do you know why I didn't like him before? When I hated him...Do you remember that?*
>
> Me: *I remember you had some pretty angry feelings.* (They are swinging back.)
>
> Jeff: *Well, see...I thought my Mom was likin' him too much, maybe as much as me. 'Member?* (Forward.)
>
> Me: *Oh, Lord, I remember. We talked and talked about how she would always be your Mom, no matter what. She'll always have friends, but special Jeff-love just for Jeff.* (Swings slowing down.) *Oh, Jeff, I wanted you to know this so badly.*
>
> Jeff: *You sure talked an awful lot about it.*
>
> Geordy: *Ya--Yak, yak-yak-yak.* (Jeff laughs really hard and gently pushes Geordy's arm as they get off the swings.) *Ya, and you know I already got a Mom. I don't need another Mom. I don't need two Moms.*
>
> Jeff: *So now we can be friends. Isn't that good?*
>
> Geordy: (Doing a little bouncy dance.) *Ya-ya-ya-ya-ya. Ta-da, ta-da, ta-da.* (To Jeff:) *Come on, let's dig.* (To me:) *Turn on the hose, we gotta have water.*
>
> Jeff: *Ya, turn on the hose.*

The Peopling Process

Accepting strong feelings as part of the curriculum makes for a different sort of school. The teacher steps down from the pedestal and out of the authoritarian role, since if children are people with feelings, so is she. Relationships between teacher and child, like those between children, change and grow. No meaningful relationship can remain static if growth is going to take place.

To assume this responsibility, teachers need dependable support. I am ultimately responsible for what does or doesn't take place in my classroom, but I always have access to other faculty members who are more experienced or skilled in certain areas. Avenues of communication are built into the structure. When you, as Teacher, are expected to be the authority, it is truly frightening to expose your vulnerable self by saying "Help." Once you have stepped off the pedestal, it is automatically assumed that everyone needs help. Asking for it honestly does not reveal your inadequacies. You are still sensitive, but you don't have that fragile vulnerability which can create the need for defense mechanisms. You are deliberately relinquishing power, but not responsibility.

Unlike many classroom teachers, I work with a staff of several people--college students preparing to be teachers. Some of them have considerable experience and are designated as Teaching Fellows. The adult-child ratio which this staff provides makes this kind of teaching possible; and they, with their diverse experiences, are invaluable resources for me.

Teachers in other settings may also have classroom aides, student teachers, and parent or community volunteers. All these people are potential resources. So, in all settings, there are (or may be): parents; community people and past parents; other faculty members; administrators and consultants; and the children. All these people help to create new alternatives when my limited resources are exhausted. My own problem-solving techniques are restricted to one human being, but when I have access to a dozen resource possibilities outside of myself, solutions keep arising--solutions which meet individual needs, rather than control behavior.

As an experienced teacher, there are many situations I can handle comfortably, but with some I need help. Children need to experience adults as dependable; they also need to know that adults don't have all the answers. My student teachers deal with some situations as well as or better than I; in others, their lack of experience or their own feelings immobilize them. Frequently, children are each other's best resource, both in giving information and in sharing feelings. Parents are essential sources of information and support.

In talking with parents, we use the telephone constantly. Parents need to know when their children are working through something that has happened at school, and we need to know what is going on at home. We always call when a child tells an adult about an experience which took place away from school and this story is confusing or the details are unclear to staff.

For example, Susan's uncle was badly hurt in an automobile accident and her mother, Sherry, had to fly east to be with her sister and their children. Susan was completely confused about what had happened and how long her mother would be away, because the babysitter, Mrs. Henderson, was making light of a very real crisis. Both Susan and her sister were getting conflicting stories from their father, Richard, and from Mrs. Henderson. I called because I didn't know how to help Susan through a most anxious time. Richard and I were able to compare Susan's information with the reality of the situation, and we found they were radically different. He then explained to Mrs. Henderson that he wanted both girls to understand that Aunt Elizabeth and their cousins really needed Sherry, and that she would be away for three weeks, possibly four. Once Mrs. Henderson stopped using words like "...a vacation for your Mother," Susan was able to handle her emotions in an age-appropriate way.

Peopling the learning environment adequately is essential in making it a place where feelings can be dealt with. If other in-classroom resources are unavailable, volunteers are well worth the effort it takes to get them and work with them. When the room is staffed with enough people, the teacher has more time to observe and work with individual children, and to be aware of their feelings.

The Tender Topics

The areas of human experience which evoke the strongest feelings are those which I call *the tender topics*. Both adults and children are often afraid of them. Such topics include:

marriage, sex, sexuality, and loving relationships;
conception, embryology, birth, and the maturation of each individual;
spontaneous abortion or miscarriage;
separation and divorce;
sorrow, grief, death, and mourning;
appropriate ways of expressing feelings;
embarrassment (When a child is utterly obnoxious in public, parents need ways of explaining how they are feeling so that a child can change his behavior, rather than a parent's having to resort to punitive measures. Children need to understand how their behavior makes another feel.);
a family in crisis;
a child or adult with special needs (the physically defective child or adult, or one with brain damage resulting in deviant behavior);
race and individual differences;
religion and differing beliefs;
the child who is having difficulty in school, either in the area of human relationships and social skills, or in the cognitive and academic areas (parents and teachers need to listen to each other);
hospitalization of a family member; and
accidents, illness, and surgery (which may have to be repeated over a period of time).

Some of these topics--appropriate ways of expressing feelings, embarrassment, school difficulties--come up all the time in the classroom. Others--death, divorce, hospitalization--are more unpredictable. Inevitably, however, most of these topics will touch the life of a group in the course of a year, and we must be prepared to cope with them--and to value them as part of all our learning.

The examples which follow are taken from my own experiences in dealing with children's and adults' feelings about some of the tender topics. I don't have all the answers; I am simply trying to make it possible for people to discuss what they are thinking and feeling. There really are no unmentionables in life. Children ask for only a little information at a time, and this gives me time to think over my values and ask myself, "What do I truly want this child to feel and understand?"

Brain Damage and Deviant Behavior

Brain damage is a broad label which covers many kinds of special needs. In the following situation, I use it rather loosely because I don't know what was actually wrong with the children we met on a trip to the zoo. Their behavior was conspicuous and noisy as they tried to communicate with the world around them. Adults nearby seemed deeply embarrassed and turned away, or looked either revolted or horrified. Our children's first response was to ridicule or mimic that which they could not understand.

Me: *Wait, Fred, I have something important to tell you.*
Fred: *Huh, what?*
Me *About those children.*
Fred: *Can he talk? That boy--can he talk? What's the matter with him?*
Me: *That's what I want to tell you. No. He can't talk.*
Fred: *How come?*
Me: *Because something happened to his brain, probably before he was born. The thinking part of him hasn't been able to grow with his body. Your body grows slowly and you become able to do more and more things. Right now you can know you will grow to be a man and you can think about the changes which are going to take place. You'll grow tall.*
Fred: *Taller than you, I bet.*
Me: *I think you're right, your Dad's so tall. You know, you'll have whiskers and a deep voice, but that boy can't know those things. He can't think. His brain stopped growing when it was Clara's age.*
Fred: *My sister?*
Me: *Do you remember how she used to explore everything with her hands? Feel everything and then stick the strangest things in her mouth? Then she learned to respond to your Mom's "No." That's when that boy's brain stopped growing. His body will grow to be a man's body, but his brain has been damaged somehow and it can't grow with the rest of him. It's sort of left behind.*
Geordy: *Did he hurt you when he grabbed you?*
Me: *No.*
Fred: *Why did he do that?*
Me: *I guess he wanted to feel me. Maybe he was responding to my smile. Most people don't smile at him.*
Fred: *Does he know what's the matter?*
Me: *I can't really answer that for sure. He knows that those people were pulling away. They looked scared and he must have gotten some kind of a cold message, but I don't think he knows how different he really is.*
Fred: *From us?*
Me: *Ya. That's why I stopped you quick, because it's cruel to mimic someone like that, and yet when you're kind of scared about the way someone else is behaving, it's easy to ridicule.*
Fred: *He puts his head 'way back--like that.*
Geordy: *He looks like he's going to tip over.*
Me: *Wait till they can't see us. I don't want to embarrass them or me. I'd feel terribly uncomfortable if their teachers were watching us.*
Fred: *They're gone. How old is he?*
Me: *Eleven or twelve, maybe.*
Geordy: *How do you know that?*
Me: *I don't, really. I'm just guessing. He's only a little bit shorter than me and his feet are bigger than mine.*
Fred: *He's as big as Wendy.*
(Long pause.)
Geordy: *He can't take care of his self.*
Me: *No, he can't look after his own body and he's not going to be able to do that. Probably he's never going to be able to cross a street alone, or dial a telephone number or cook hamburgers.*
Geordy: *Like we did?*
Fred: *Ride a bike! Could he do that?*

Me: *No. I'm not sure he can run. He doesn't seem to have much control over his large muscles. He's never going to be able to have our special relationship, either. He can't experience what the three of us have together right now this minute. Let's wait now because these are very personal things we're talking about. They're coming back and we need to have the privacy of our own room or the car or our yard. I'll call your Moms and Dads so they'll understand you when you explain about him. I know you want to talk about this some more, but now we have to wait.*
Fred: *Ya, I want to talk about that.*

At lunch, perhaps thirty minutes later, Fred returned to our conversation with an almost identical choice of words.

Fred: *Let's talk about that some more. The boy that's putting his head 'way back.*
Andy: *Like this.*
Ricky: *Why can't he talk?*
Me: *That's hard for me to explain. Look at Sean. He's tall and his body is strong, and it took maybe nineteen or twenty years for all those changes to happen. You can see all those changes, but at the same time, Sean's brain was maturing too. That couldn't happen for that boy. Somehow his thinking part got stuck in one place, so that he can't learn very much. It just won't happen for him.*
Ricky: *Will he get old?*
Me: *Chronologically, yes. The years will go by, birthday by birthday, but he won't seem any older even though his body will look a little older each year. Although he's older than you, his brain isn't old enough even to go to nursery school.*

After lunch, we walked over to the children's zoo. It was then between 12:30 and 1:00 p.m. By this time, the road and entrance to the domestic animal pen were quite crowded with groups of children and teachers. Several of our kindergartners felt very comfortable waiting in line with groups from other schools. Jeff and Joel were ahead of our staff by about six people, and directly behind the brain-damaged children. Neither boy had been involved with our earlier discussions, so they were taken quite by surprise when the older children turned and made indistinguishable sounds and bizarre body movements. Wendy, one of our student teachers, went directly to Jeff and Joel, while another, Cammi, came to find me. She quickly explained the difficulty, and I hurried to our two waiting in line for the children's zoo. Two situations had to be worked with simultaneously. The brain-damaged children had to be protected from ridicule, and Joel and Jeff needed guidelines for behavior, plus an explanation that was realistic and comprehensible on a five- to six-year-old level. I said right off, "This is very personal, and we have to go where we can't be heard." We found a quiet place.

Jeff: *What's the matter with that freak, anyway? He can't even wait in line.*
Joel: *Is he crazy or something?*

I used just about the same words I had used previously with Fred and Geordy (because they seemed to carry meaning the first time). There wasn't any set way to explain what had happened to those children; all I could do was be open and honest to the best of my ability. As we were leaving, Jeff asked, "How did you know?"

Me: *The same way you knew. When a person behaves in an obviously abnormal way, something is terribly the matter. It's scary when you see it for the first time; that's what made you imitate their way of moving and making sounds.*
Jeff: *Could we have a kid like that in school?*
Me: *Ya, I have before, but everyone could understand that she couldn't think like you and I think.*
Joel: *At Pacific Oaks?*
Me: *No, when I worked in another school.*
Jeff: *Would you have one now?*
Me: *If it was relevant for the child and you.*
Jeff: *What do you mean?*
Me: *Wait a minute. I have to find the words...*
Joel: *You're slow, come on.*
Me: *Don't push me! Just wait.*
Jeff: *I don't want to wait. Would you?*
Me: *Look, you know that a lot of changes have taken place for you, here at school. You expect them and so do I. Right now you are in the middle of*

learning to read. You have maybe ten words that you are absolutely sure of. You can read them today and you know you'll be able to read them tomorrow. That's not how it was with Melina. When she learned something one day most of it just slipped away from her during the night, and we would have to go through it all over again the next day. It was easy having her at school because everyone just helped her with the things that she couldn't do, like the buckles on her overshoes and the zipper on her snowsuit. I would take one person like Melina, but not two, because we had to have one adult with her pretty much of the time.

Joel: *Was that you?*

Me: *No, her mother or father came to school with her every day--mostly her mother.*

Jeff: *I guess that's all right.*

When we went back to the line, both boys were under control and not a bit embarrassed by the brain-damaged children's behavior. This is all I want to achieve through the discussion of tender topics at school. Adults have learned to be embarrassed or self-conscious.

Understanding Sex and Sexuality

Field trips stimulate discussion of many topics. Driving down Fair Oaks Avenue on our way to buy masking tape, we passed the "girlie" movie theater.

Dana: *Hey, look, they don't have any clothes on!*

Manuel: (Looking all around.) *Where?*

Dana: *Not the people, dummy. The pictures in the movie theater.*

Manuel: *Yaaa...Hey, they're naked.*

Dana: *Naked movies. Hey, Molly, are the people in those movies really naked?*

Me: *That's what it says, so I guess they are.*

Beth: *You mean, they really don't got any clothes on?*

Me: *No, they really don't.*

Dana: *You mean, people go to the movies to see people without any clothes on?*

Me: *Mmmm. Yes, they do.*

Manuel: *That's crazy. Don't they know what naked people look like?*

Dana: *Are those people all grown up? Grown-ups should know about not having any clothes on.*

Manuel: *Of course, they know. You can't get grown up and not know about people being naked.*

Lisa: *Then how come they go?*

Manuel: *Ya, how come?*

Me: *That's hard to explain.*

Dana: *Well, make a try, come on!*

Me: *Well...you know about the warm, loving relationships between your Mom and Dad.*

Manuel: *You mean making babies and kissing and all that yucky stuff?*

Me: *It's not yucky stuff, Manuelito, and you really know that. The people who go to those films haven't had the full heterosexual experiences that our lives offer. That means relationships between men and women--like Ted and me and your Moms and Dads. They have to look someplace else and it's kind of sad and pathetic when you think about it. You can't find the human relationships missing in your life by looking at movies. Grown men and women can be very happy together and you know that. You live in your families and you see it every day.*

Manuel: *Well, if they know what people look like naked, it seems awful dumb to spend movie money on that.*

Another day, another trip. Dana, Tammy, Gerry, and Manuel, six-year-olds, were riding home from the Art Museum. Dana leaned over and kissed Tammy on the cheek.

Manuel: *Oh, yuk, do you love her?*

Dana: *Yup.*

Manuel: *Ya gonna marry her?*

Dana: *I don't know. Maybe.*

Manuel: *Yuk! Molly, do you got a boyfriend?*

Me: *Yup. Same one for, what? Twenty-two years, I guess.*

Manuel: *Do you T.V. kiss?*

Me: *Sure.*

Manuel: *That's all slobbery and yucky. I don't like wet kissing. How can you like that?*

Gerry: *Ya, how come people like that?*

Me: (I stopped the car on a side road near school.) *You need to understand such a lovely part of grown-up love and I'm going to run up a lamp post if I drive and talk.* (I turned around so I was leaning over the seat and Manuel was sitting on my feet.) *You can know that as you grow your body will change and all these changes are pretty visible. You won't be able to see your voice change, but you'll hear it and know when it is happening. These growing-up body changes you know about already, but there's an ability to love and be loving that grows up too. The hard part about explaining loving in words is that you can't see grown-up feelings like you can see grown-up bodies. At the same time your body is changing, growing taller and bigger, there are neat invisible changes that take place in your lovingness. It's really hard for me to put this into words, just because people don't talk about it much, so I haven't had much practice.*

Manuel: *Loves get bigger?*

Me: *That's it! It's maybe like when you drop a pebble in the casting pond and all those neat circles go out and out and out. They all come from the same place, but each circle sort of pushes the next one along. Manuel, that's neat. I never thought about loves getting bigger in just that way.*

Gerry: *I still don't like T.V. kisses.*

Me: *That's O.K., because that's a part of grown-up loving that hasn't grown up in you yet. That sounds funny, but I don't have a better way to explain it right now. Think about all the changes you know are going to take place in your body. Tammy's body will be like her Mom's and mine, and yours will be like your Dad's. Think about the changes you know about. You'll get ever so much taller, and your body will fill out. Your voice will change, and hair will grow on parts of your body.*

Dana: *My Dad's got hair on his back and his tummy--arms, too, and legs. Fuzzy arms. Does hair grow on a penis?*

Manuel: *No. My Dad's got no hair on his penis.*

Dana: *Mine doesn't either.*

Gerry: *Mine neither.*

Me: *No, your pubic hair grows only in your groin where your legs join your body. Not on your penis.*

Dana: *You too?*

Me: *Me too, and my Mom. All grown-ups.*

Gerry: *Are you hairy? Like I mean?*

Me: *Yes. Girls have the same hairs in the groin, on the outside of my body where my legs join on.*

Gerry: *But not whiskers like my Dad has. My Mom doesn't have whiskers. You're fuzzier than my Mom. Your face, I mean.*

Manuel: *Why?*

Me: *Why what?*

Manuel: *Why do I got so much changes?*

Me: *Are you asking about body changes?*

Dana: *Yup.*

Me: *Such a lot of special growing takes place, and it takes years. Such a long, long, time. Maybe it happens slowly so you have time to get used to the changes and learn to live with them and your growing body. All bodies are slowly changing.*

Manuel: *Not you. You're the same.*

Me: *Me too. My hair is getting just a little bit grayer all the time. Things like that.*

Dana: *What else?*

Me: *Wrinkles. Little wrinkles slowly become a part of me and my body. Wrinkles I never had before.*

Gerry: *You don't got wrinkles. Have you got wrinkles?*

Me: *Sure. Look at my knuckles and look at yours.*

Manuel: *That's not wrinkles. That's too much skin.*

Me: *That's what wrinkles are--too much skin where it wasn't before.*

Gerry: *What about a bed? Wrinkles are in a bed and they have lumps.*

Me: *Wrinkles can be in lots of places--like my skin, or the sheets on your bed, or my shirt before I iron it.*

Tammy: *Could you iron people-wrinkles?*

Me: *Could you?*

Dana: *No! My God, you'd get one hell of a burn!*

Me: *Exactly. I'm not about to be ironed.*

Manuel: *That's funny.*
Me: *Not really. You just never thought about it before.*
Manuel: *Hey, Dana, you're gonna get wrinkles.*
Dana: *Maybe someday. Not today. I gotta get bigger before.*
Manuel: *Thoughts get bigger.*
Dana: *Did you bring juice? My hungry is awful bigger.*
Me: *Ya, juice, crackers, and peanut butter.*
Tammy: *Let's eat.*
(We all ate a peanut-buttery juice.)
Dana: *Hey, what about Tammy?*
Me: *What about Tammy?*
Dana: *Her body. She's gonna be like you.*
Me: *And your Mom, her Mom, and my Mom. It goes on and on and on.*
Dana: *Keni. What about her?*
Me: *She's a bitch dog.* ***She's a girl, sure, but she's also a dog.*** *And no matter how you slice the cake, dogs are a little bit different than people.*
Dana: *Ya, you'd look really funny with puppies.*
Me: *I guess I'd feel funny, too. I liked my babies one at a time,* ***thank you*** *very much. It's 12:00 and we're late. Oh, Lord, your Moms are going to worry about us.*
Dana: *Not mine.*
Tammy: *Mine's still in her yard.*
Gerry: *Mine's gotta get my sisters.*
Manuel: *Mine knows where I am.*

Hospitalization

Accidents, illness, surgery, and hospitalization are other areas which can leave adults groping for words; some are rendered speechless and others change the subject or leave.

About two weeks before Suzanna was due for eye surgery, we began talking about what her hospital experience was probably going to be like. She was well aware that her left eye was pulling in toward her nose and that surgery was going to be needed, but there was no point in preparing her too soon. It is possible to over-prepare a child and make him apprehensive. I keep a fairly well-equipped doctor's bag at school, and Suzanna took it home over the Christmas holidays. This seems to be a particularly helpful arrangement for children going in for tonsils and adenoids.

When Suzanna returned to school in January, her eye was still a little swollen and the ointment exaggerated the black and blue area. The children asked many questions about the hospital, which she answered with confidence. Anna, a student teacher, spent thirty minutes with her on the typewriter, alternately asking questions and punching the keys. I heard only snatches here and there.

Suzanna: *And ya know what?*
Anna: *What?*
Suzanna: *The nurse had a sphygmomanometer that fitted me. Molly's isn't any good. It's too big. Air comes out of that balloony part.*
Anna: *What's that?*
Suzanna: *Don't ya know? The blood pusher thing.*

The following day at juice and waffle time:

Suzanna: *Know what I hated? What I didn't like the most?*
Anna: *No, what?*
Suzanna: *Those men wore yucky, icky green pajamas all day long. They didn't get dressed at all.*

Suzanna's parents were so supportive and loving throughout the entire experience.

When Bruce's two-year-old brother, Jay, went through a similar operation, Bruce wrote the following letter to Jay:

> *I wish you didn't cry when you get sleeping shots. I wish you didn't cry for Mama when she goes home and leaves you at the hospital. Please, Jay, be a good boy for Mama. Jay, I love you and I wish you wouldn't cry. When Mama leaves me at home I just don't know how I feel and I hate myself when I'm naughty. I'm not very naughty usually when Mama goes to the grocery store. When you cry please don't because you hurt my ears.*

He told a student teacher, "When I'm alone, my brother yells in my ear so loud I can't stand him and I call my Mom on the telephone...and I don't know what to say...I *do* know what to say."

Jay's mother was not able to spend the night in the hospital, which created all kinds of anxious feelings in Jay. We desperately need caring people in pediatrics who have knowledge about the total child--not his body only.

Having Babies--and Things That Go Wrong Sometimes

Peter's mother, Hilda, had been in the hospital for seventy-two hours. She was between six and eight weeks pregnant when there was an emergency requiring major abdominal surgery. Peter knew about the pregnancy, but had had almost no experience in discussing life, birth, and death. Because he had never been exposed to accurate information, he assumed that the fetus which his mother had just lost was actually a perfect miniature baby about three inches long and with all the human qualities *he* possessed.

Peter was standing at the work bench, his body stiff, his head bent over pounding nail after nail into two triangles. His mouth was moving constantly, but no words were forming. I came across the yard and moved down to Peter. I put my arm around his body, without actually touching him. This child was in agony, but I didn't know what he had been told or what he was experiencing.

Me: *Peter, do you remember yesterday when you told me your Dad was going to take you to the hospital to see your Mom? They don't usually let children visit, and I've been worried about you because you wanted to go so badly.*

Peter: *I didn't go. Me and my Dad didn't.* (He begins to lean on me as he pounds--nail after nail, bang, bang, bang, for four minutes.) *The baby's already dead.*

Me: *Oh, Peter, that is so hard. You really wanted that baby to be coming in May.*

Peter: (Pounding more nails.) *Why didn't they give him to me. Me and Terry and Grandma Lee could take care of him. He could be in my pencil box.*

Me: *Peter, that little, little thing wasn't ready to live outside your Mom's body. It takes a long, long growing time before a baby is ready to be born and live outside the mother's body.* (Pounds again.)

Peter: *Why does she have to be there so long? Why do they take so long?*

We then talked about needing special care after surgery, and how tender her tummy would be. He remembered Sarah's mother after her appendectomy.

Peter: (Pounds again for a long, long time.) *Suppose she already gets dead before she comes home?*

Me: *That's really frightened you and you need to talk to your Mom on the telephone. I'm going to call your Dad right after school, while he's at work. I'm so glad you told me your fears, because I can really help you now. I talked to your Dad last night, and your Mom is doing so well. She's tired and she has a tender tummy, but you need to hear her voice.*

Peter: *You talked to Dad?*

Me: *Mmmhumm.*

I called his father, Roger, and we talked about Peter's real fear for his mother. Hilda had told Peter about the hospital and that her pregnancy would be terminated, but Peter had not been able to talk about his anxieties. Roger took Peter to the hospital, and he saw Hilda waving from the window, and then they talked on the phone together.

It was particularly important for us all to support the family's religious beliefs, regardless of our individual values. Many of the parents and all staff members felt that Hilda's pregnancy should never have been discussed within the family group (particularly with the children) until it became obvious. We discussed these two areas daily in our staff meetings, because blaming someone after the fact blocks the growth which must take place. Adults carrying around unspoken accusations weren't going to help Peter to work through his anxieties. Peter discussed and asked questions about simple embryology for weeks, and finally got his facts pretty straight. On a Friday at 9:00 a.m.:

Carri: *Molly, guess what? Peter's coming to my house for lunch. Isn't that great?*

Me: *That is.*

Carri: *Where's Peter? Did he get here yet?*

Me: *No, not yet.*

Carri was on my knees as we waited by the gate. These two had grown very close over the previous six weeks. They were the youngest in the group and both very physical. They did a lot of hugging, pushing, and hand-holding, with all the appropriate words. "I love you." "I hate you." "You're my bestest friend." "You can't be my friend, not no more, not never." They really stuck together.

After Peter arrived, this incident occurred:

Peter: *That's my shubbel. Don't you know about turns?*

Carri: (Screaming at the top of her lungs, with tears rolling down her cheeks.) *I know about turns. It's my turn and I want it.*

Danny: *That's not how turns work. He gets to finish. Taking's not turning.*

Peter: *See, that's what I'm telling ya.*

Teaching Fellow: *Peter knows you're waiting for a turn. It's really hard to wait when you want his shovel right away this minute. You could use the hose while he and Danny dig.*

At 10:30, after juice, Peter and I were sitting on the porch steps.

Peter: *Is she the one with the baby? Carri, I mean. Does her Mom got a baby?*

Me: *Yes, Tricia's maybe six months, maybe five. I can't remember.*

Peter: *Well, I'm not going. See! I'm not going with some dumb old baby. See!*

Me: *Yes...I'm hearing you. Is it too soon, Peter? I didn't realize you were suffering so very much. It'll take time.*

Peter: (Gets up and tears off for Carri before I can get my thoughts together.) *Carri! I'm not going. I'm not going with no baby. I'm not going to your house!*

Carri stood absolutely still. She opened her mouth, but no words came out. I picked her up and walked over to the Library. I said, "That really hurt your feelings. You need to know what's been happening for Peter." I decided then and there that Carri had to know the whole situation. Their relationship was a total experience, and Carri has such empathy. It wasn't fair to either one for a misunderstanding to confuse their lives.

During the weeks that followed, Peter made many trips to Carri's house when Tricia was with a grandmother, babysitter, or friend. Many adults found it very difficult to accept Peter's feelings. They simply refused to believe that a child of four could truly live what Peter was living. I don't have the words to explain Peter's experience. The children were really responsible for healing his wounds.

Carri: *Is your baby dead long enough so you could be in my car yet?*

Peter: *Nope, I don't want no babies. I'm not never gonna be with babies.*

Andy: *My Mom didn't have a baby before we got Henry. She didn't have a baby in our house and it was awful bloody all over the bathroom.*

Peter: *What?!!*

Me: *Andy's looking for the word "abortion" or "miscarriage."*

Andy: *That's it. My Dad told me. What she got was a miscarriage.*

Peter: *What's that?*

Andy: *That's when the Mom can't make a baby. The cells that make the baby don't stick and it unsticked all over our bathroom. So now we got Henry and he sticked. I'm not mad at babies. That's dumb. Do you want to see my baby drink my Mom's milk? She's got lots and lots of milk. She's got so much milk. Do you got milk, Molly? I mean in your breastes?*

Me: *No, not anymore. My babies are all grown-up. I haven't nursed a baby for sixteen years. My babies are babysitters now.*

Annie: *Cory babysitted me.* (Cory is my daughter.)

Andy: *That's funny.*

Annie: *What?*

Andy: *Having a baby for a babysitter.*

Annie: *She's not a baby. She's as big as Molly.*

Three babies were born to families in the group, and two were nursed, bathed, and dressed at school. The day finally came when Fred asked Peter to his house for lunch.

Fred: *I've got a baby, ya know. Are you gonna be mad at Clara? I don't want you being mad with my sister, see?*

Peter: *I know you've got a baby. I've seen her enough times.*
Fred: *Well, are ya?*
Peter: *What?*
Fred: *Gonna be mad?*
Peter: *No, I don't have to be mad now.*
Fred: *Did you tell Carri?*
Peter: *Sure, I was at her house yesterday week. The day before this day.*
Fred: *You were?*
Peter: *Well, of course. I can go there any time I want to.*
Fred: *Well, God damn! Come on, Peter, Eater, Beeter, Smeeter. Let's go! Let's go! Let's go!*

And they danced out the gate.

It took us from October through April to work all this out, not only for Peter, but also for the peer group, parents, and staff. When a different child became involved in the children's conversations on this topic, either the teaching fellow or I always called the family so they would know what their child was experiencing in school. Once you, as teacher, are willing to step off the pedestal, your relationships become deeper and more rewarding, and you get down to what life and relationships are all about.

There were times when there were real misunderstandings among the adults, and we had to be prepared for this. Steven's mother's baby was due in April, and the following conversation took place in mid-March:

Andy: (To the student teacher:) *Know what, Jill? When Henry's drinking my Mom's milk, milk keeps coming out her other side he isn't drinking at.*
Steven: *We're going to have a baby. My Mom's going to have a baby. She's going to get it real soon.*
Fred: *We got ours now. We got Clara. Me and my Dad.*
Andy: *Your Mom got milk.*
Fred: *Yupper! She's the milkiest Mom.*
Peter: *We didn't get a baby. Our baby got dead.*
Fred: *But you're not mad at babies now. I'm glad 'cause you can be my friend.*
Steven: *Can a baby die before it gets born, while it's still inside its Mom?*
Andy: *That's a miscarriage. My Mom got one of those when the baby didn't make right.*
Carri: *Your baby's not dead. I saw him. Not this day, but a different day at school.*
Andy: *Not Henry, dummy, the other one.*

Jill, the student teacher, didn't realize what Steven's question about babies dying meant for him. He had immediately made a connection with his own baby, who was to be born in about ten days. At lunch that day, he said to his Mom, "Did you know a baby can die while it's still inside its mother, before it's born?" His mother was understandably upset, and brought me a note the following morning. She felt that a student teacher should not be allowed to handle a conversation when the subject was so very tender.

In our staff meeting, I expressed my concern for Steven. The adult must be aware of what a child's question means for him, not just aware of the facts. Children inquire because they need information, but frequently they will ask what sounds like a general question, when really they have a very specific concern. They learn what they live, in a sense, and we as adults often find it difficult to be open about our feelings and our fears. Jill had been slightly embarrassed by the subject, and in her embarrassment, forgot she could use me as a resource person. Steven's question should have been dealt with right then, on the spot. He needed to understand that Andy, Fred, and Peter were talking about a spontaneous abortion in early pregnancy, not a stillborn infant.

Death and Grief

Triscuit

There are always animals present in our program. Like our own, their life processes--birth, illness, and death--become part of our shared experiences. This is what happened when our eight-year-old rabbit, Triscuit, died.

Carri: *Can we go to the Arroyo today?*

Me: *Not today, Carri. Triscuit died this morning very early, before school, and we need to decide where to bury her and dig her grave.*

Fred: *Have you got her here? Can I see her? Where is she?*

Me: *In the back of the Toyota, wrapped in a bath towel. You can see her just as soon as we go get her.*

Geordy: *Well, come on, let's go.*

(We all crossed the parking lot to the car.)

Carri: *Can I hold her?*

Me: *I think I want to carry her, Carri. She's still kind of stiff, and it's a bit awkward.*

Geordy: *Molly, are you sad?*

Me: *Yes, I'm sad. Triscuit was a really neat girl. She's been at Pacific Oaks for six years, and has been in eight children's groups. She was a sensational mother and a marvelous pet.*

Geordy: *Are you gonna cry?*

Me: *You know, I didn't know the answer to that question till you asked me right now. No, I'm not going to cry, but I wondered about it this morning. I thought maybe I would when I talked about her.*

Fred: *She died at your house, huh?*

Me: *Mmmm.*

Joel: *Did you just find her all dead in her cage?*

Me: *No, I had my coffee at 5:00 and then went out to check on her, because she's been so old and sick. She was having convulsions, so I brought her into the kitchen and tried to make her more comfortable. The bottom of the cage is awfully hard, and she kept bumping her head when her body would stiffen and relax.*

Joel: *Did she get dead then?*

Me: *Mmmm.*

Joel: *Like going to sleep?*

Me: *No, not a bit like going to sleep. All the special and important parts of her body have stopped working now. There is no life in Triscuit's body.*

Fred: *Where do you want to dig?*

Me: *Her grave?*

Fred: *Ya.*

Me: *Somewhere near the cage and over by the fence.*

Betsy: *Her heart stopped beating.*

Sherry: *And she isn't breathing.*

Carri: *She's still soft.*

Patsy: *Look at her feet. Her nails aren't pink no more.*

Trudy: *Her eyes isn't either.*

Ralph: *Her ears are sort of gray like. How did she get to change color?*

Sherry: *Does being dead change color?*

Me: *Yes, in a sense, because she isn't taking in any oxygen. It's the oxygen in the air we breathe that made her ears, eyes, and nails pink.*

Andy: *Does she know she's dead?*

Betsy: *Dead is dead, so how can she know she's dead?*

Geordy: *Well, then where's the rest of her?*

Me: *What do you mean? I'm not understanding your question.*

Geordy: *You know, the part we used to be with. You can't play with that. It's not her. You know what I mean!*

Andy: *That's what's dead. My Mom was with Lucy when she died. She was holding her hand and she died. Triscuit's just dead. She sure is awful dead. 'Member that chicken? She was dead like that, just awful dead.*

Fred: *Hey, is the hole deep enough? You better look.*

Andy: *That's not a hole. That's a grave. You put people in a grave.*

Fred: *Triscuit's no people, dummy. She's a rabbit.*

Andy: *Well, she's still dead, isn't she? People get dead and a rabbit and a bird and a worm--even a worm gets dead. Trees too. Like our tree 'cause it didn't get water.*

Fred: *Hey, Molly, are you gonna bury that tree? I'll bet you couldn't bury that tree.*

Me: *No, I'm not about to bury a tree.*

Fred: *There was an old Molly who buried a tree. I don't know why she buried a tree. I guess she'll dee.* (Fred and Geordy double up with laughter, and then return to the business at hand.)

Patsy: *Why did she die?*

Me: *Because for a rabbit, she was a very old lady. Ritzy's old, too. Rabbits don't live much beyond seven.*

Patsy: *Is Ritzy going to die?*

Me: *Yes, when his body is old and no longer able to function, as it happened for Triscuit.*

Patsy: *Will he get diarrhea too, like her?*
Me: *I doubt it, but I really don't know.*
Joel: *Are we down enough now? It's lots deeper than before.*
Me: *That seems fine. You did a fabulous job moving all that dirt and rocks.*
Joel: *Can we put her in now?*
Ralph: *I'm doing that.*
Me: *Let me cover her body again, so that the earth won't be right on her. I'd feel better knowing she's snuggly wrapped.*
Carri: *Why?*
Me: *I don't know, really. Maybe because it seems more caring and dignified. I just somehow don't like the idea of the dirt and rocks right on her body.*
(Ralph placed her body in the grave.)
Andy: *Goodbye, Triscuit. I'm not ever gonna see you again.*
Joel: *Hey, I thought you said you weren't gonna cry.*
Me: *Well, I wasn't, but Andy's words threw me.*
Patsy: (Offers a Kleenex.) *Here, you better blow. You can keep it if you need to.*
Now the flowers. They come next. That's what you do, isn't it?

Young children have such compassion and openness and are usually more comfortable with the tender topics than are adults. They are truly able to meet the needs of a vulnerable individual. Jerry, a student teacher, spent this portion of the morning indoors, because the whole experience was too painfully close to his father's death. The children accepted the simple statement that it was too soon, and gave him the privacy he needed.

I received very positive feedback from the families of those involved in Triscuit's illness, death, and burial. All the comments had to do with the simple fact that the majority of adults hide these three areas of life away from children, under the cloak of protection. Whom are we actually protecting? Adults need to ask this question, and answer it with honesty.

When Geordy's carpool driver came for him at 11:30, he said, "We just buried a dead rabbit."

Driver: *That's nice.*
Geordy: *What?!!!*
Driver: *I mean, that's too bad. It must be up in Heaven.*
Geordy: *She's not up in Heaven. We just buried her in the ground. Her grave's over by the cage. You want to see the flowers me and Fred got?*
Driver: *I'm going to get your brother.* (And she hurried out the gate.)
Geordy: *She's a nut.*
Me: *No, she's not. She's confused and embarrassed. She's probably never talked about death, and she just didn't know what to say to either one of us. I'll call your Mom, because you may want to talk more about this, and you'll need someone who can hear you.*
Geordy: *I'll tell my Dad, too.*

Death is a part of all our lives. Children and adults are able to help each other deal with the pain we all experience when simple direct words are used.

When Hal's dog died, he brought me a beautiful story called *Growing Time* (Warburg, 1969). The story deals with an experience identical to his own. The dog in the book was very old, and died a natural death, leaving the boy with all the sad, loving feelings to work out. Hal was right there himself, and I have been through the same experience three times.

Me: *You know, I can't read this book now because it makes me cry so that I can't read the words out loud to you.*
Hal: *Did your dog die like that?*
Me: *Yes, and when I read that book, I'm right there all over again. You need that story now, and I can't read it to you, but I think Wendy would feel okay about it.*

If I had tried to make excuses for not reading, Hal would have felt that either I didn't care about him and his concerns, or that I just didn't think his dog was very important. We talk about it once in awhile now, and he will ask if I've read *Growing Time* out loud, and I have to say "No."

Hal: *You read it to yourself though?*
Me: *Oh, yes.*

Hal: *Do you cry?*
Me: *Yes, I do.*
Hal: *Well...maybe some day...?*

Sandy

Sandy had been tiring easily for about a week. When I mentioned this to his mother, Tassie, on Friday, we both thought he was coming down with the flu. Monday, Tassie said the weekend had been quiet and uneventful, and Sandy was eager to come to school. By Wednesday, I was again concerned, and called Tassie that night. Sandy just seemed to be running down during the morning, and was quite exhausted by 11:00.

The next day, when we were making doughnuts, I happened to look at Sandy. He suddenly looked terribly sick. It was as if his skin were transparent, and I could see every blue vein in his body. Heidi took over the frying, and I found Sandy a blanket and pillow and a cozy place in the room near the hearth. When Tassie came at 11:30, she said she would take him to the doctor the following morning.

She called that night to say Sandy was terribly anemic, had been given a large dose of iron, and would be seen again early the next week. When there was little or no improvement, he was hospitalized for further tests and observation. Thursday morning, Tassie and Sandy's father, Carl, were told that Sandy had acute lymphatic leukemia. Tassie called the school immediately, requesting that a message be sent to me in the yard.

At this point, we had somewhat of a breakdown in the communication of confidential information. The secretary answering the telephone was understandably upset, and in her confused and sympathetic state, she told office personnel and parents and staff in Shady Lane that Sandy had leukemia. I was in the Library yard, reading to a small group of children when she handed my teaching fellow a note with the information that was supposedly coming directly to me. Mora, my teaching fellow, read the note and burst into tears. Fortunately, Heidi, one of the student teachers and a parent of a four- and a six-year-old, was completely together in her thoughts and actions. She sent the teaching fellow inside and sent an assisting parent to get me.

By this time, about fifteen people had confidential information that was intended only for me. Because of the secretary's expression, tone of voice, and mannerisms, and the teaching fellow's tears, the children wanted to know immediately what was wrong with Sandy.

Me: *He's a terribly sick boy right now, and he's going to have to be in the hospital for maybe ten days to two weeks, and he'll have to be at home for about the same length of time after that.*
Manuel: *Well, that's not much of anything to cry about. What's the matter with Mora, anyway?*
Me: *Well, if Sandy misses four weeks, he's only going to have two weeks left before school is out for the summer, and that's not much time.*
Manuel: *Oh, shit! I'd hate that. To get no school for that many days would be bad. I'd run away to you.*
Me: *Well, you wouldn't have to run away, because I'd come and see you.*
Manuel: *And bring the lizards?*
Me: *And bring the lizards.*
Manuel: *All three?*
Me: *If nobody bit me. I have trouble picking them up.*
Manuel: *Ya, you're not very good at that. You're scared when they move fast like this.* (Runs like a lizard.) *Right?*
Me: *Right.*
Manuel: *Oh, well, I'll still go camping with you.*

I went inside and sent my teaching fellow home, because she was really unable to function at this point. It was then 11:25, so I returned to the gate. I wanted to be there in order to set limits and clarify adult behavior. Specifics were needed immediately. My first concern was for the children in my yard and Sandy's brother's yard. My second concern was to set the stage for Sandy's return to school as soon as he went into remission. And my third concern was to help the parents and staff handle their anxiety without letting fear take over.

My room mother, Margot, had been in Shady Lane when Tassie had called, so she already knew that Sandy was critically ill. Ideally, we should have had a parent meeting that night. Since this was impossible, Margot called every single family in the group, and I called each head teacher in the school.

When approximately fifteen people have received second-hand information from an extremely emotional source, the facts rapidly become distorted, particularly when it involves a child with an illness people automatically assume is terminal. When I reached the gate, the first question I received was, from a mother, "Will Sandy live through the weekend?" I took both her hands in mine and said, "I need your help now. As soon as he's on the proper medication and goes into remission, I want Sandy to come back to school. It's absolutely essential that no one, under any circumstances, asks about or discusses Sandy's health in or around the yards. I can be called every night between 8:00 and 9:00. If we as adults start discussing what is happening to Sandy and his family here at school, in front of four-, five-, and six-year-olds, we could create an environment full of anxiety, and I don't think that's good for children or adults."

I had one hundred per cent cooperation. Over the next week, I had numerous telephone calls with thoughtful questions, which I answered to the best of my ability.

Question: *What are you going to say to the children at school?*
Answer: *Sandy is terribly sick right now, and needs special loving care beyond what moms and dads can give at home. When he's through the critical time, he can go home for a period of convalescence, and then back to school with us.*

Question: *What should I tell my child?*
Answer: *Try to convey the same thing we are saying here at school.*

Most of the questions that I received over the telephone had to do with adult anxieties, rather than with what children were actually asking. What seemed to be most helpful was for me to ask the parent how the child had phrased his question. Then if it turned out that it was the adult's question, I could answer on two levels. First, an answer for the hypothetical child question, and then a straight answer to the adult.

Parent: *What do I say to "Is Sandy going to die?"*
Me: *How did Johnny put his question to you?*
Parent: *Well, he hasn't yet. I was just trying to figure out what I'll say when he does. I just want to be prepared.*
Me: *I don't know what to say. What I'm seeing and hearing at school makes me feel that we've set the stage adequately for illness and convalescence. I don't see the children thinking of Sandy as a dying child. I think that's our problem; and certainly what I'm hearing from Tassie and Carl reinforces this. Sandy's last bone marrow test was considerably better than the previous one, and he should be going home at the end of next week.*

The learning experience for the staff was painful, but growth and maturation took place for all but my teaching fellow. Because of where she was in her own personal life at that point in time, she was never able to relate naturally to Sandy or to his parents when he did return to school.

Sandy was able to come back to kindergarten as planned, and he went on to first and second grades. He died the following Fall. I was deeply touched when his father came all the way to Pacific Oaks to see me the morning after Sandy died. He could have called on the telephone or written a letter, but he wanted to convey in person what we as a school had meant to them during those first weeks of Sandy's long illness.

Adults Express Their Feelings

When adults are anxious, angry, or embarrassed, these feelings often get in the way of honest communication with children. The tender topics invoke these feelings in all of us. In the preceding episodes, we saw adults having difficulty in dealing with brain damage, miscarriage, and death.

These are overwhelming experiences for us all, and we try to help each other with them. Other more ordinary, daily experiences generate smaller doses of intense feeling, which we also try to share in order to deal with them.

Adults' angry feelings, when directed toward a child in the form of blame, are very threatening. But when expressed as simple statements of how the child's words or behavior are making them (the adults) feel, they often help to clarify the situation for everyone, and lead to problem-solving.

Adults working with children must try to be honest, open, and straightforward with their verbal and body language. Body language is a particularly powerful learning experience for small children. Sometimes it conveys feelings which are at odds with those being expressed verbally.

Spontaneous anger is usually a constructive emotion; it's what one does with it that can hurt or be injurious to a child's self-concept or body. An adult's angry response needs to be appropriate to the situation and an acceptable means of communication with the child. The following interactions show our struggles to communicate concerns or strong feelings in an appropriate way.

We had had a bike day, and children had brought their bikes to school. At going-home time, Nat's carpool driver was having a terrible time fitting his bike into the trunk. We were all hot and tired after a marvelous ride. Nat, in his impatience began using words like "stupid," "dummy," and, "Are you an idiot or something?" I was unloading bikes from the roof of the Toyota at the time, and came down to be with them. I was angry, and said so: "Nat, you're making me really angry! Christy is having a terrible time loading *your* bike in *her* car so she can take *you* home and *you're* standing there calling her names. I don't like your words and you're making her feel awful." Those were simple words, and Nat understood my message in a flash. He needed an alternative instantly. This is the *adult's* responsibility, and the alternative has to follow the message *immediately*, so that the child is protected from embarrassment and humiliation.

Me: *How did you ever make that thing fit this morning? Can you remember which way the front wheel was turned?*

Nat responded as quickly as the alternative followed the message.

Nat: *Ya! I got it. We had the front wheel turned completely backwards. Then the handlebars fitted under the top of the trunk.*

One Monday when I arrived in the yard at 8:15, there was a revolting mess waiting in the outside sink. Children had broken into the supply cupboard over the weekend and made glorious goo out of flour, salt, paint, and cake mix. Above all else, I hate walking into somebody else's mess on a Monday morning. I always feel so good when I pull into the parking lot with a load of lettuce for the bunnies and plans in my head. Our own mess belongs in the category of all-in-a-day's-work, but somebody else's mess makes me positively livid (especially when I have to face it at 8:15 Monday morning).

David usually came to school at 8:30 or 8:45. This early arrival gave him extra time to unwind before coming in contact with other children. Because his special needs were quite unusual, he and I had been together for two and a half years. He had worked through some extraordinary personal growth experiences with me, and as a result, we were particularly close. He was beginning to function with confidence and pride, and we both felt terribly proud of his independence.

He had learned to read me like a book, yet frequently I would forget his fantastic sensitivity to body language. On this particular morning, I was standing on a hollow block with my back to the gate working the plunger in the sink. The water was on full-blast, so I didn't hear the gate slam. David couldn't see any part of my face, and my head was slightly bent. He walked right over to the sink and said, "Well, what are you so mad about?"

Me: *Look at this yucky sink. I'm fit to be tied, when I find this God damn mess on Monday morning.*

David: *Naughty, naughty, naughty.*

Me: *You're right, but when I get really angry it comes popping out.*

David: *Angry is popping.*

It was very obvious that the amount of anger I was experiencing was inappropriate, given these circumstances, but since I'd been caught in the middle, it was important to make my verbal language consistent with the body language he had observed. Children are consistent, but adults frequently are too controlled. Sometimes an adult's controlled behavior can cloud what should come across as a clear message.

The following interaction is an example of a double message--an unacceptable message--and an adult's appropriately expressed anger:

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Frequently on school trips we run into adults who give an unacceptable message with their interpretation of humor. One year a new storm drain was being put under California Boulevard. We spent weeks watching the process and recreating it by digging up the sandbox. At one point, the **workers** hit a gas pipe, and the action became terribly dramatic. All sorts of gauges and dials were madly whirling. When it was safe for us to move closer, we went to see our friend in the white hat. He let the children lie down on their tummies so they could see into the huge "excabation." To their great delight, a man appeared out of the darkness. He was absolutely covered with mud from the tip of his toes to the top of his hard hat. His eyes positively twinkled from behind all that goo when he saw the six little faces peering down at him.

Tammy: *What are you doing?*
Man: *Burying a dead cat.*
The children were absolutely horrified. (So was I.)
Lisa: *Is he really doing that?*
Me: *No, he's not.*
Manuel: *Hey, stupid--you're stupid.*
Me: *He must think he's funny or something, but I don't think he's funny. I think he's rude.*
Dana: *Hey, mister, know what? You're rude, that's what.*

It is also important to clarify your feelings about a child's actions. When a child knows you are aware of what he has been doing, and he really doesn't feel good about it himself, he needs your support. By saying nothing you give a nonverbal cue that says you go along with his behavior. Many children become terribly embarrassed when they suddenly have to relate to both their teacher and a parent at the same time. They may become overly silly to the point of being almost high, or they may start hitting mother. Then all three people become embarrassed, and neither adult knows which one should take the leadership role in setting the limits. If the teacher can stoop right down to the child's level so she is face-to-face with the child and put feelings into words, and then quickly suggest alternatives, she can prevent an ultimately negative interaction. For example, I might say, "Oh, Tracy, I know you're feeling embarrassed. It's really hard to be with your Mom and me at the same time when we're doing all the talking and you're not included. Would you like me to walk out with you and Patsy? You have a lot to carry."

This acknowledges her feelings and also gives her both support and an acceptable way of leaving the yard. If the adult says just, "Oh, stop it," or, "Don't act like that," the child has no alternatives to choose from. If the teacher lets the behavior continue until mother and child leave, she is saying she will accept the unacceptable, and the situation will repeat itself. Children are able to respond honestly and with openness when adults give straightforward messages.

Feelings and Cognitive Learning

The discussion of tender topics adds a great deal to children's factual knowledge of the world, and helps them deal with their emotional concerns. Knowledge which is related to strong feelings is knowledge which will be remembered. This fact is as true in teaching basic skills as it is in teaching science and social studies.

Thus, reading will be taught most effectively by beginning with the words that matter most to a child (Ashton-Warner, 1963). Children need to be reading and writing the words they are speaking. Put these words on flash cards or pin them all over the classroom. Avoid the traditional approach of putting the words a child *can't* read on flash cards; this is a lesson in negative reinforcement.

Communication skills need to be reinforced on many levels. The pre-primer and primer are feasible learning techniques for some children, but others may be hindered by them because the vocabulary tends to be unrealistic and the plot non-existent or sentimentally nauseating. From a pre-primer:

Father! Father!
See Father.
Come, come.
Come and see.

If one of the children in kindergarten or pre-kindergarten expressed himself in this manner, I would be extremely concerned about his social and emotional growth and development.

Those are not the words children use. Below are some lists of children's words. Mario, age 5, kindergarten:

skeleton
Brontosaurus
zoo
Allosaurus
Brachiosaurus
Diplodocus
Stegosaurus
dead
extinct
egg
hatch
membrane
reptiles
mammals
born
nurse
tit
milk
eat
chew
teeth
molars
cloven
hoof

Tricia, age 5, kindergarten:

toilet
bathroom
B.M.
bowel movement
bottom
penis
girl
boy
man
woman
lady
baby
stethoscope
horse
Mommy
Daddy
me
Tricia

Suzanna, Anna, and Kirsten, age 5, kindergarten (these words are for a spelling book to be used in a school for their dolls):

telephone
record
party
music
book
run
grocery
hell
adios
gracias
pair
fair
care
lambchop
roast
can
pan
fan
butterfly
caterpillar

In contrast, here are the first twenty-four words from a standard basic sight vocabulary list, primer level:

all
am
are
at
be
ate
black
brown
but
came
did
do
eat
four
get
good
have
he
into
like
new
must
no
now

A child's reading language should relate to his oral language. The graded vocabulary found in a primer is an uninspiring means of communication. Life is not dull; it is filled with love, joy, happiness, grief, sorrow, anger, hate, fear, monotony, and peace.

Josh came to a tutorial open classroom for third and fourth grade children. His reading was already labeled as being two grades below level, and his verbal communication "lacked expression and meaning." In this classroom, adults worked with small groups and individuals.

Josh and Mia were pulling pages from magazines and making up their own stories to go with the pictures. I was holding Josh's book while he punched holes for the brass fasteners when we both happened to look across at Mia's magazine. She was holding a picture of an enlarged human elbow with a rubber tube tied just above the joint and a syringe needle partially inserted into the vein.

Josh: *Hey! I want that. Gimme that for mine.*
Mia: *Get it from your own pile.*
Me: *What's happening in that picture?*
Josh: *Christ! The kid's shootin' smack. Man, you can kill yourself doin' that.*
Me: *You mean shooting smack or mainlining?*
Josh: *Both! Jesus, when you're hooked, you're dead! I gotta have that.*
(Mia handed over the whole magazine and came around to our side of the table.)
Mia: *What's the matter with your eye? Dog bite ya?*
Josh: *Na. My brother hit me.*
Me: *That looks terribly painful. He must have been awful angry to hit you like that.*
Josh: *Ya, he was.*
Mia: *What did you do, tease him or something?*
Josh: *Naaaa.*
Mia: *Did ya steal something of his?*
Josh: *Naa--well, kinda.*

Mia: *Money?*
Josh: *Na, see, he has these little red pills, see. He takes 'em a lot, see, and when he's takin' 'em, he's real mean. He hits me.*
Me: *God, that's so hard. Is he hooked?*
Josh: *I guess so, now. He kept 'em in his drawer, and my Dad said he'd turn 'im in to the cops if he had that stuff, so I flushed 'em in the head. That's when he really hit me.*

Josh knew a lot about drugs and human suffering. The childhood play plot of the school reading material was absolutely useless to him because it had no relationship to his personal life. He dictated a hair-raising story to me and he could read every word of it. Josh already was labeled as a child with a reading disability, one who lacked motivation, and a trouble-maker.

Because of his brother's experience with drugs, he wanted to know what happened to a person's body and heart when he was on Speed. He learned to use both the stethoscope and sphygmomanometer accurately. Josh practiced on the staff, his classmates, and Jennifer, our four-month-old ewe lamb. From drugs and the human body, we moved to mammals and, specifically, ewes, rams, and lambs. Jennifer was a most cooperative subject for study, and Josh became a rather skilled handler. This particular program was extremely well-staffed, which meant I was free to work with Josh on a one-to-one basis each time we met.

Avoiding the Label of Learning Disability

Josh had been labeled as learning-disabled. We use labels too frequently and too soon. No two bodies are in exactly the same place in their growth process. The process of maturation is unique to each individual. There are no identical children, yet there are teachers who follow the same curriculum guide year after year. In an enriched, more flexible program, labels are less likely to be attached to children. When a variety of choices and opportunities for problem-solving are available, children need not experience the negative reinforcement of failure.

Learning in an open classroom is positive reinforcement. The more successful children become, the more pleasure they derive from their experiences. Can you picture what would happen to a toddler's self-esteem if he received a "D" or an "F" every time he fell down? Negative reinforcement is usually humiliating, and undermines self-confidence--regardless of age. The beginning walker and talker is capable of self-directed learning and proceeds independently. Adults are aware that they cannot accelerate the process of acquiring these two skills. Our responsibility lies in providing a supportive environment. A toddler will have much more fun in a room furnished with a desk, sofa, coffee table, and sturdy chairs than he will on a basketball court. If his learning environment remained as unsupportive as the basketball court, he would very quickly be labeled as a child with a learning disability.

When the learner is allowed to pace himself, he can spend a longer period of time in a particular area, while skipping over others. What may be the saturation point for one child will simply be an inadequate amount of time for another. Some babies need to crawl longer than others, and some children need to spend a longer period of time acquiring certain concepts. Their learning process is greatly enhanced through active participation and involvement.

Children are excellent judges of their own needs, and we must trust their decisions. The process of learning can continue as a positive experience only when the child feels good about himself. Self-esteem, or a healthy self-concept, is absolutely essential if we are going to have warm, mature adults who are able to relate to one another. In an open classroom, the child can return to the same activity over and over, and experience success one hundred times a day if he needs this. "I'm good at this. I can do it. I can. I'm a successful me. I'm a me that can accomplish and do." If the pre-primer, primer, workbooks, and worksheets are all that are available, the learner misses completely the chance to repeat and reinforce his skills. He can't go back and repeat a page in his workbook because his writing is already there. When wide and varied choices are available, a child can reinforce a skill without monotonous drill and at the same time that new learnings are taking place.

Fred, Geordy, James, Patrick, and Ralph built a two-story house with the "blocks that locks." A wing nut and six-inch bolt are used to stabilize the horizontal and vertical pieces. The bolt must pass through three separate holes, and then be secured with the wing nut. It's possible for one child to do this alone while building the first story, but once the second floor has been put in place, two people must work together. The child on the inside has to shoot the bolt through and then hold it in place, while the child on the outside screws on the wing nut.

James: *Hey, Fred, the bolt's not coming. What's the matter, can't you push?*
Fred: *I am. Something's making it stop. Damn it.*
Ralph: *That's a bad word.*
Fred: *Oh, Ralph, shut up! If you're so great, you come and make this go.*
Ralph: *I can't, I got to hold this corner. Get James.*
Fred: *Hey, James, you come in here and do this.*
James: *Well, I got to get the bolt when it goes through, and if I come in the house I can't reach it.*
Fred: *Get Pat. He screws good.*
James: *Hey, Pat, will you put the wing nut on if I go in and help Ralph?*
Pat: *I could screw that wing nut.*
Fred: *See, I told ya. Now you get in here and do this, see?*
James: (Both boys are now on their tummies on the second floor.) *Hit it. Hey, Pat, gimme a block so I can hit this.*
Ralph: *Lift that middle block. The bolt's not in the hole.*
Fred: *What do ya mean?*
Ralph: *See that hole? The bolt goes through that hole, then it has to go through the middle hole, but the middle hole isn't there--it's down too low.*
Fred: *I get it! I get it! I get it! Lift it. Come on, Pat, lift it.*
James: *That's too much. Fred, you go do it.*
Fred: *Not me.*
Me: *I'll help you mesh the threads while Pat holds the perpendicular post.*
Ralph: *What's perpendicular?*
Me: *Perpendicular? The up-and-down post is perpendicular or vertical. They're both neat words.*
Fred: (Now on the outside.) *How did Pat get so good at screws and things? He sure is good.*
Me: *Tell him that. That'll make him feel so good.*
Fred: *Pat, you're a good screwer, know that?*
Pat made no comment. The bolt came out through the third hole. Fred started to screw on the wing nut.
James: *Quit pushing! I can't hold it. Screw, don't push.*
Fred: *Damn.*
Me: *Mesh the threads. Gently, gently. Great! You did it! Fred, that's the first time!*

Fred then proceeded to screw on seventeen more wing nuts. The process of coordinating eye-hand with precision grasp has made small muscle activities terribly difficult for him. He has always been able to perceive a meaningful whole, but unable to see the separate parts. At five-and-a-half, he could ride his bike with no hands down the long hill at the Arroyo, yet it was impossible for him to assemble his wooden wagon. Geordy's completed wagon was a perceivable image, but Fred's pieces on the workbench became a frustrating, meaningless pile of wood. Maturation is such an individual experience, and it can't be hurried. Fred has always been aware of his own superbly coordinated little body. Music, rhythm, body contact projects, and large muscle activities have been his success areas.

His first sudden flash with mathematical sets came when he was sitting in a tree watching Pat count the pieces of wood he and Amos had just cut on the power saw. There were four sets of ten arranged by two's on the walk, with nine more blocks placed two, two, one, two, and two. Fred was in a tree about eight feet from Pat and six feet or more off the ground when the flash hit him.

Pat: *One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. I've got ten blocks.*
Me: *Try putting your fingers on the blocks as you count.*
Sidney: *Seven isn't next. That's not ten.*
Pat: *What?*
Me: *Sidney's made a discovery and he wants to help you.*
Pat and Sidney: (I'm holding Pat's hand as they count.) *One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine.*
Sidney: *See, it's nine. There isn't any ten.*
Pat: *That's ten there.* (Pointing to a set of ten.)
Me: *You have ten and ten and...*

Pat: *And ten and ten and this many. How many is this?*

Sidney: *Nine.*

Ben: *That's forty-nine. Pat, what do you want forty-nine blocks for?*

Fred climbed down from his perch in the tree and crossed over with such a jaunty swagger.

Fred: *You guys are counting by tens, huh?*

If Fred had been in a traditional classroom and required to sit still for long periods of time, he probably would have been labeled as a trouble-maker and a child with a learning disability. His visual perception seemed to mature simultaneously with his ability to tolerate an increasing number of choices from the curriculum. As he ceased his flitting from activity to activity, he became involved, and as he got involved, his skills improved. All of us learn by actively doing and reinforcing the experiences. Sitting still at a desk or a table deprives a child of total involvement.

When Fred was with me the previous year as a four-year-old, I tried to hurry his learning process, with the following results. Fred's first experience with an open classroom and a multiplicity of choices was very confusing. He would flit from one activity to the next without really getting involved in anything, so we limited the available alternatives to three or four. One morning the activities were making pretzels, working on the typewriter with Anna, sorting beans from a basket, and working in the block area. Fred chose sorting beans. There were four different kinds: red kidney, peas, garbanzos, and white. We had little cold cream jars with screw-top lids, and it looked to me as if the project was going to be a lot of fun. I was also very much aware of Fred's need for activities which required lots of eye-hand coordination and precision grasp. Fred started out with gusto; then his enthusiasm petered out and he said, "Molly, where did ya get these beans?"

Me: *From the supply cupboard.*

Fred: *Well, how did they get all messed up like this? Did you do that?*

Me: *Well, yes, I did.*

Fred: *Boy, you're dumb. What did ya do a thing like that for? You sort 'em out yourself.*

And he walked off. A student teacher came in at that moment and found me having the giggles in the midst of a thousand beans.

"Being There" for Children

To work with children in the ways I have described requires both adequate staffing and adult willingness to deal directly and openly with whatever happens. In this sort of program, one will not find children who lack motivation.

When the teacher is really free to observe the children pacing themselves, she can pinpoint their shaky areas and work from there. When a child can feel good about himself, feel comfortable within his peer group relationships, and trust himself and others, the academic skills happen more easily. Children who experience confusion, emotional turmoil, and the pressures of anxiety need self-protection. The defense mechanisms they will create tend to interfere with other areas of growth and development.

All learners blossom in a classroom which focuses on the successful person. It is possible to live one's school life without failure when the teacher has the following goals in mind:

1. To facilitate the process of learning for all individuals peopling the classroom.
2. To provide an environment which will allow warm human relationships and values to flourish.
3. To provide a classroom structure, form, and shape based upon discovery, exploration, and active learning through active participation.
4. To meet individual needs through a curriculum which emphasizes success, self-esteem, and a healthy self-concept.

Children and young adults need to be able to trust the adults peopling their world at home, at school, and in the community. The adults, in turn, must be worthy of this trust, and live up to the simple expectation of being reliable.

Much of our responsibility lies in helping an individual deal directly with strong feelings. Displaced anger, fear, or grief in a parent or teacher is an inappropriate and unhealthy experience for a young person. We can't be perfect, but we can be honest and say, "I'm sorry I yelled at you. You scared me and I sounded really angry, and that's not how I was feeling at all."

Being an honest, open, reliable person worthy of trust is an obtainable goal for us all. It must be reached if we are going to have healthy people in our schools, who in turn will become healthy parents and responsible, contributing community members.

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II. DEALING WITH THE BUILT-IN RISKS

5. Redefining the Teacher's Role as Authority: A Theoretical Approach for the Open Classroom

Lilah Christina Carney

There is no consensus in this society about goals for children. There is also little or no consensus in the fields of education and psychology about the best methods to achieve the goals that *are* defined. For example, reading. Though there are plenty of publishers claiming their systems (glorified word for "kits") have been proven to be the best, and the astonishing variety on the marketplace makes it look as if we have a lot of things to choose from, on closer analysis, these systems are much more *alike* in the experiences they offer children than they are different.

While there is no sure truth in the matter of educating children and no guaranteed course of action to which we can all be expected to adhere, Piaget has shed some light on the discussion for me. I think his description (1969) of the dichotomy between active and passive education is a valid one, and even more useful is his distinction between the *unilateral* and *reciprocal* forms of relationship between adult and child in the classroom. Any such appeal to opposites is an oversimplification, of course, and most programs will fall somewhere along a continuum between the two poles. However, in Pasadena at present, the Alternative School and the Fundamental School clearly represent a polarization of the community on just these issues. There is a significant difference in the *general conception that the educator forms of the child* in these two schools, and from these conceptions are derived two different ways to relate to children.

If there is no consensus, there is choice, at least in these two schools--a meaningful choice between two really different approaches. The controversy has touched other schools in the community as well, with some parents demanding more openness, others demanding more control. I don't think there is any way to teach without throwing your chips in for one side or the other in this matter of how we see and relate to children. The reasons for needing clarity on this point are two-fold: given the politics of schools, a teacher must be able to defend her actions with precision; and children need a basic consistency in the expectations placed on them and in the responses they receive both at home and at school.

I have made my own answer to this "fundamental question." My relationship, as an adult, to the child I must educate is a reciprocal one. I believe that *childhood is endowed with its own genuine form of activity* and that my role as a teacher is to support and further this activity.

I am aware that the choice I have made is a personal one. It reflects my life style in general as well as my teaching style. An open classroom is not necessarily the best style for every teacher, child, or family, just because it is for me. However, I am still inclined to speak about the "better" education children should receive. *Your* choice is your own, and I hope you believe it is the best one you can make.

In his book, *To Understand is to Invent* (1973), Piaget quotes Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, December 10, 1948. This article concerns the right of every person to a free education through at least the elementary level. Section 3 states, "Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children."

> *They* (the parents) *have the right to be, if not educated* (themselves) *at least informed and even instructed about the better education that their children should receive...Above all, the problem is that of knowing how to act with parents of their type: good people wanting only good for their offspring, but through ignorance or traditionalism against all that really might be useful to them.* (Piaget, 1973, p. 81)

He goes on to describe the kinds of problems open classroom teachers most often have with parents:

> *...If one has confidence in known methods in usage for a long time there is some worry at the idea that one's own children might serve as experimental subjects,*

> *or "guinea pigs" (as if every change in program, book, or teacher in a traditional school were not an "experiment" as well!).* (Piaget, 1973, p. 82)

The other hindrance to an acceptance of active methods is what Piaget describes as the parents' preoccupation at all levels of education that "their offspring not turn out to be backward," that one's child should at X years of age be able to walk, to count to twenty, etc.,

> *...while everything warns against artificially rushing, and advises the dedicating of this beginning period...to the establishment of the most solid foundations possible. Now the multiple activities of manipulation and construction that are necessary to assure the practical substructure for the whole of later learning seem to parents like a luxury and a waste of time.* (Piaget, 1973, p. 82)

The approach I am talking about does look considerably different from the traditional model. Even when such a program is most carefully done and well thought out, it's hard to see the learning happen unless the observer knows what to look for. So the parents' right to be "informed and even instructed" isn't just a liberal ideal, but an absolute necessity. Reports of failures in alternative schools, free schools, and classrooms where teachers decided to "open up" without knowing how to handle the chaos which resulted from suddenly giving choices to children who had never had them before, in an environment where there were not enough things to choose from, have even the most enlightened parental supporters of open classroom education wary when it involves *their* children.

In fact, all the first year of Pacific Oaks' kindergarten-primary program, the head teacher's phone rang every night, with parents--founding parents, pilot project-writing parents--not-quite-asking, "But, Doris, it doesn't *look* like a school...How are they learning to *read*?" (*Are* they learning to read?) By the second year of the program (my first year), it was obvious that they *had* learned to read and write, add and subtract, and, what's more, to think, to solve problems at appropriate K-1st grade levels, and at times far beyond.

There were some, as in any setting, who were not yet ready to read. (There were other things other children were not ready to do, but reading is the one that gets people uptight and the one that is most obvious in public schools--to the kids themselves and to everybody else.) For these children, and for children with other skills that hadn't shown up "on schedule," we prescribed time, a rich environment, and practice that came in a supportive context *after* basic skills were acquired and not before. So reading became just one thing the child was learning among many other things she or he *was* good at and excited about. There were some children for whom the time to read was long and hard coming, and at the end of third grade the struggle was still not over. These children could be diagnosed as having special needs and could be labeled with all kinds of labels. To us, they were themselves, and reading was something that was hard for them now, but they would learn to read in time, and we were there to help them.

That reading is difficult for some children is a fact of human development. Not all the materials, space, interest, caring adults, love, or money can bypass some learning difficulties (nor can training, pills, or discipline[1]). What a rich environment *can* do, and the reason it is so important, even though it is not the miracle solution to problems of this nature or any of the other problems of growing up, is to keep the child feeling she or he is okay, that there are things at school that she or he can do, that reading is like teeth coming out or jumping from the top of the structure into the cargo net or understanding the rules of chess. These skills happen for different children at different times. In short, our children began to learn about human development--their own, their friends', and sometimes painfully for us, our own (the adults who learned from the children how to teach them).

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[1] I read an advertisement for "complete, detailed, easy-to-teach" *Classroom Activities for Helping Children with Special Needs*. The "separately packaged units" are "tailored" for children who, "for a variety of reasons, fail to perform up to their abilities and who may be victims of an apathetic outlook toward all learning," children who are hyperactive, perceptually handicapped, or "children of all abilities and backgrounds who have trouble adjusting to themselves and others to such an extent that it interferes with learning." (This category includes excessive talkers.) These people claim to know. Using the latest advances in science and technology, they promise systems and packages and pills that will make the rough places plain for teachers of children suffering from M.B.D., dyslexia, hyperactivity, and growing up. Excessive talking, indeed! To make my bias clear, I believe in and distrust the educational/industrial complex that peddles products promising easy solutions to complex human problems. For more information on this topic, read "The Business of Education" by Edith Green, U.S. Representative, in *Accountability in American Education*, edited by Frank Sciara (1972).

Redefining the Teacher's Role as Authority

During my experience as a student and a teacher at Pacific Oaks, I have seen many caring, idealistic people student teaching or teaching, both within the public school system and in alternative programs. Some find supportive master teachers or principals and they thrive, feeling good about what they do with the children. Others find it impossible to meet what they regard as the most basic human needs of the children, nor are many of their own needs met. Like the children, they manage to endure their school terms in dehumanizing settings. Of these, some get out of teaching, bruised and shaken, feeling it is more than they want to go against; some try again, resolving to demand nothing less than a setting that meets their survival needs, and from this base attempt to meet the needs of the children. Others let the ideal go, and their "realism" frightens me, for in accepting the reality that it is impossible to attain the ideal, they have stopped trying for the possible. They go every day and play the game. They make a living at it.

I was once a child and was taught by many teachers who were there to make a living. I vowed I would never do that. There were many things I vowed I would never do to children if I became a teacher. Now I am an adult who teaches children and often I find myself doing those same awful, insensitive but expedient things I swore I would never do. To my horror, I completely understand why I do them and why they were once done to me. Often it seems the *only* way I know to deal with "discipline problems," given the time or energy I have to give to one situation, to one child out of so many.

Even in Adventure Yard, this most ideal of open classrooms, well-staffed to a fault (one of us to every six of them), where the children are loved and well-fed at home, and have a school full of neat things to do (with enough pencils if two or three who shall be forever nameless wouldn't karate them all), Janet still hates math and can exhaust me with her games to avoid doing it; the only car Andrew wants is the one John has, though there are six others at his disposal; Mark likes it when other kids get mad at him for scribbling on their papers; Mindy *won't* help with clean up *and you can't make me*. We both know she's right. When it comes down to it she can always go limp. Ricky and Ted enjoy yelling all through class meeting and Nancy hides in the ball cupboard until it's over every chance she gets because it's too noisy.

I keep feeling that if they *only knew* how much better it is here than anywhere *I* ever went, anywhere they will probably go when they get out of here, how we all knock ourselves out to give them freedom and choices and use their interests to teach reading and math, how hard I try to give them reasons when I have to insist, then they would see the justness of my demands and cooperate, thanking their stars for such a wonderful school and such good teachers. (The ingrates!)

Hadn't I chosen to teach in the open classroom because it promised a way to *avoid* being the tyrant, to eliminate the necessity to impose my will on children, to bridge the gap between teacher and child, and to work together as equals? After all, I am very close to the child in myself, wanting very much to share that with them. Why can't they see that? Why must they continually force me to assume the role I reject? I know this is a personal reaction, but I'm not the only beginning teacher who goes through this shock. There is a selection factor operating on the kinds of people who are attracted to open classroom teaching which makes this issue one that many novices have to face so they can get on with the business of what it really means to be the *teacher* in the open classroom, and not just another kid.

It dawned on me, with irreducible, inescapable uncertainty: I am an adult; no matter how good a friend I am, how few limits I set, how gently I stand firm, I am still, to them, The Teacher, as Mrs. Novack was Teacher to me back in first grade in Morristown, Indiana. Like it or not, by virtue of my role, my size, my age (whether I want to own it or not), I still retain some of the power of the inequality between adult and child.

I denied the reality of that power, resolved never to use it, and found myself slipping from one extreme to the other. I abdicated all authority and then landed with both feet on a child who unreasonably insisted on pushing too far--insisted out of a perverse need to make me be just who I least wanted to be, a need to turn me into the ogre, the disciplinarian (dirty word), the nag, the withholder of desires, the goad and the sting, the spokes-

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person of the eternal NO!

Recently, Tim, one of my star third grade psychologists, and I had a very enlightening conversation about teachers:

T.: *All the teachers this semester are terrible.*
Me: *You're right. We're ogres.*
T.: *All the teachers last semester were ogres, too.*
Me: *That's what we're here for. You should be proud to know that you are being taught by some of the best ogres in the country.*

(This entire conversation was conducted with great good feeling on both sides. It was mutually understood.) I owned it; I finally owned it!! And it didn't seem to make him the least bit uncomfortable.

This is only one aspect of teaching, of course, but a vital one with which to make peace. Otherwise, one should go work in a nice civilized bank where (hopefully) people do not go around pushing each other's buttons all day. Or do they? It must be great fun and most informative to play with other people's emotions. I never had the courage. Or did I, once, before I painfully learned to respect other people's facades? I was certainly educated in a setting where the facade was to be maintained at all costs, and it has taken me a long time to get it to relax its hold on my life.

What are the children learning in Adventure Yard? Psychology. They conduct experiments on the authoritarian personality, on aggression, on the power of language to shock, to hurt, to comfort, to manipulate, on territorial imperative, on peer group pressure, passive resistance, and mutiny. They also know about community, about sharing and helping, about loyalty and fair play, about taking care of each other, and about asking for what they need. They instruct me in honesty in dealing with painful emotions. They allow me no slack.

There have been so many adults in the lives of these children--by the time they are in third grade, ninety student teachers have practiced on them. They are not necessarily like other children in some ways. They are not totally dependent on any one of us to validate their existence because they have so much access to each other and to so many different teachers. They have seen plenty of adults make mistakes and can spot in an instant any hesitation on our part. They have learned through necessity to sort out from their own problems those which really belong to us, the inexperienced adults who are learning to be their teachers. They sense that we are trying ourselves out on them and they in turn use us freely for the business at hand--their own human development.

I caution the reader that these remarks I make about the teacher's role in the open classroom have been drawn from my own experience in a unique situation. The Pacific Oaks kindergarten-primary program is not an exact model for how other open classrooms ought to be, but much we have learned there is applicable in other classrooms--especially the things we have been able to discover while working so closely with individual children in a setting where they are free to be themselves. We have learned much about children and about ourselves.

One thing we know for sure: no matter how child-centered the open classroom is (and here is a crucial distinction between open education and the free school movement or "laissez-faire" approach), we are still the adults in the situation and are called upon to serve in some version of the role of authority. There are many versions, all falling somewhere along the continuum between the unilateral (traditional) and the reciprocal (activity school, open classroom) poles. The question is: What does each of us want our version of authority to be, and, because we are not operating *carte blanche*, how are we to explain our choice to others involved (parents, administrators, legislators, school boards)? It is because I feel this question to be so significant that I have undertaken to redefine this role of authority in the open classroom.

In order that we begin this discussion from a point of common departure, I include the dictionary definition of *Authority*:

> *1. The power or right to give commands, enforce obedience, take action, or make final decisions; jurisdiction. 2. This power as delegated to another; authorization: as, he has my authority to do it. 3. Power or influence resulting from knowledge; prestige, etc. 4. A person or writing cited in support of an opinion. 5. Usually in pl. a government official or other person having the power or right to enforce orders, laws, etc. 6. A person with much knowledge or experience in some field, whose opinion is hence reliable; expert.* (Webster's *New World Dictionary*, n.d.)

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The word "authority" is a confusing one because it may be used in very different ways, sometimes by people who think they are having the same conversation since they are using the same word at the same time in the same place.

One kind of problem arises when teachers are authorized only to carry out the decisions of others but feel they are better able to make their own decisions about how they will relate to children--a conflict of definitions 2 and 5 with definition 1. A different problem concerns how teachers are to enforce either orders from above or their own decisions. How does the teacher arbitrate problems that arise in the classroom? How does she maintain order? Is there a difference in the way authority is upheld in the two types of education we have discussed?

Then there is the teacher's role as authority in the *intellectual* sense. Is the teacher a person with much knowledge whose opinion concerning the children is reliable (definition 6)--an expert? Or is the teacher one source among many who can be cited in support of an opinion--a resource? Or does she have no opinion at all, but merely herds children through the state curriculum? Is she the purveyor of absolute or relative truth? Whose truth?

All aspects of authority change radically in the open classroom, and with them, the underlying attitude toward the teacher as an expert qualified to make decisions concerning the adult systems to which she must answer. Because these changes have not been thoroughly discussed, I feel it important to see if my experience at Pacific Oaks sheds any light on the issue in general.

As there is so much at stake in making changes in contemporary education, I believe the changes must be well thought out and they must have some validation. That is, there must be a way to substantiate the assumptions upon which new methods are based.

I suggest two ways to do this: first, my observations of the children's reactions give me feedback and my own reactions give me feedback; second, there are three theoretical approaches that give me useful input. I value the exchange that takes place between the practical feedback and the theoretical input. I would not feel comfortable depending solely on my own intuition in intervening in the lives of children. I don't think I would grow as much, personally or as a teacher, if I relied solely on my own resources.

The three general theories that I have found most helpful are: 1) an analysis of children's behavior from a developmental perspective, particularly the developmental psychology of Jean Piaget; 2) an analysis of children's behavior from an environmental perspective, particularly the ecological psychology of Roger Barker; and 3) an analysis of the behavior of both teachers and children from the perspective of communications theory, particularly the transactional psychology of Eric Berne.

I will attempt here to explain these theories as I understand them and to describe how I use them in my overall approach to becoming a different kind of teacher. I will describe how the theories find application for me in moment-to-moment interactions with the children and how I use them as tools in solving problems that arise in the yard.

These theories combine in my head to form what I have come to call a "professional filter." I run my ideas and feelings through this filter before I react--or sometimes *after* I react (although I'm getting faster). This process doesn't dampen spontaneity. It helps me out of my very human tendency to see everything in terms of *ME*--*my* plans, *my* feelings, *my* needs. In agreeing to teach fifty-two human beings--children and college students, not to mention the parents--I believe I am committed to going beyond my own narrowly personal perspective. Instead of a nebulous feeling that I shouldn't have done *this*, ought to have done *that* and *that*, I have some very specific ways to evaluate my actions and order my priorities in Adventure Yard's open classroom.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

The Structure in "Open Structure"

"Open classroom" is a garbage term--that is, it is used to describe many classrooms that bear little resemblance to each other, either in outward appearance or in underlying attitudes toward children and learning. In general, it seems to mean that not all children are doing the same thing at the same time, though this may mean that they are on different pages of the same workbook--the "individualized instruction" sense of openness. Or it may mean that children may make choices about what they want to do, but the number and variety of things from which they may choose, and the source of the things to be chosen vary widely.

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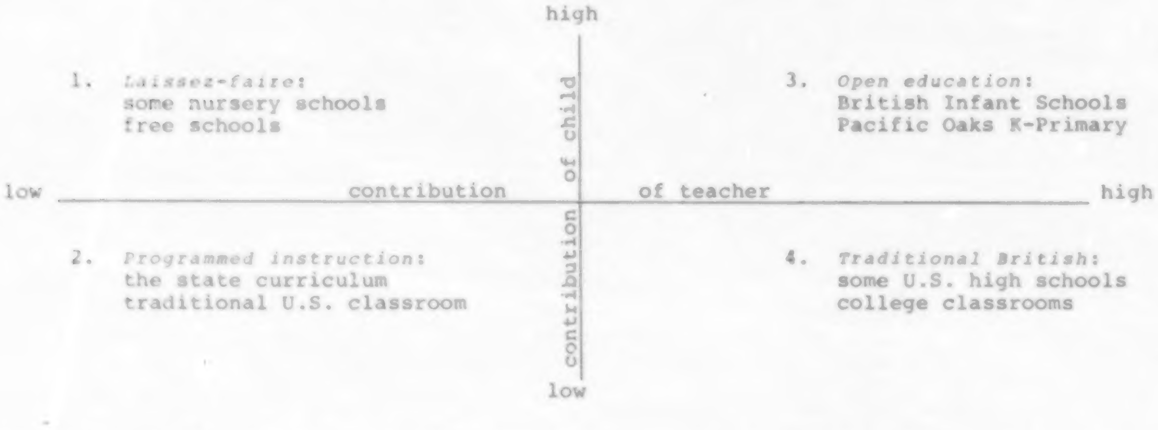
There are the "activity center" and "task card" approaches where a certain number of children work at each activity for awhile and then at a specified time all groups rotate. Some classrooms even have bells that can only be heard subliminally and arrows on the floor indicating the way to the next center. Teachers in these classrooms may look upon classrooms where children create their own schedules and choices--and may even choose to do *nothing*--as chaotic non-schools. Proponents of the freer, child-initiating style tend to think of the former as "not really being open at all."

Thus, "open classroom" means for some an innovative way to rearrange traditional classrooms so they look different, while in reality nothing has really changed in the relationship of the child to what he is doing or to the teacher who tells him what to do. For others it approaches a free school or progressive school with the teacher's role reduced to "one of the group" or nurturant observer--either a variation on the old structure or no structure at all. I prefer the term "open-*structured* classroom," cumbersome as it is, to "open classroom" because it firmly implies that there *is* a structure. Like those who consider activity centers and individualized instruction something other than "open," I believe the child should have the power not only to make choices, but also to generate them--to make suggestions for activities and to be able to pursue his or her own meaningful questions. I do not, however, see my role as one of the group; much as I might like to, I cannot convince the children I am simply one of them. Nor am I content to be a nurturant observer. I have too many things that I want to share, and too much knowledge that the children will need, to take a passive role in deference to their increasingly active role.

Perhaps there is some unconscious concept of limitation which leads people to think that when children become more active, the teacher necessarily becomes less active--that when more input comes from the child, less need come from the teacher. It is my experience that the human beings in an open-structured classroom form a great sponge, together soaking up and relishing all the experiences that come along--regardless of the source--once the excitement and pleasure of learning have been accepted, and as long as the experiences match the needs and understanding of the individuals involved.

Bussis and Chittenden (1973) have developed a valuable tool for examining the role of the teacher in various types of classrooms, which is an amplification of Piaget's distinction between active and passive education, and which counters the assumption that active children imply passive teachers. They describe the good open classroom as bringing "active adults together with active children." Theirs is one of the best articles on the subject of what a teacher *does* do in the open classroom. They have devised a "Double Classification Scheme Based on the Extent to Which 1) the Individual Teacher and 2) the Individual Child Is an Active Contributor to Decisions Regarding the Content and Process of Learning":



Bussis and Chittenden define the categories shown in the above diagram as follows:

1. The contribution of the teacher is low; the contribution of the child is high: schools where adults avoid expressing personal preference or making direct suggestions; some free schools; nursery schools where the emphasis is on nurturance rather than promotion of cognitive skills, teacher as caretaker, teacher as helper.

2. Children have little to say about what they will do (low); teacher is passive conveyor of decisions made elsewhere (low): teachers teach "by the book" without questioning

the suitability of state texts or programs for themselves or individual children; teachers and children are bound to packages, guides, manuals, and other gimmicks which implement goals imposed from outside.

3. Teachers trust children to make decisions and generate input (high); they also generate input and at times make decisions for children, expanding or limiting the choices available to individual children in a given situation (high).

4. Students have little to say about what they will do (low); teachers tend to make their own decisions about both method and content, may have a highly individual way of presenting long division, Latin, or Shakespeare, which they have evolved themselves (high): teachers tend to give much thought to the quality of what they provide and whether or not they are reaching each pupil, but give little credit or chance for decision-making to students; the teacher's personality occupies center stage; this kind of teacher is often remembered, sometimes with fondness, sometimes with anger.

The teacher in America shifts from position 2 to position 3--the greatest possible change on the scale--when she or he opens up the classroom. In this matter of changing the teacher's role, the authors found that it was often easier for teachers to change in a vertical direction--that is, to expect more from children in learning because they are interested, and to give them more freedom and responsibility to make choices--than it was to change in a horizontal direction--to abandon the passive role of enacting a program and to actively create their own instructional approach. "This can require a shift from subprofessional status and self-image to a more professional view of her role."!!! (Bussis and Chittenden, 1973, pp. 214-218)

The Concept of Metastructure

In Adventure Yard teachers are *very* active, constantly involved with children in their activities, in their academic work, in conversations with them about their feelings. When not interacting, staff members observe the children's independent activities, deciding when to intervene with adult authority.

The structure of a program lets teachers know where they must be and when--this includes the schedule, the organization of the environment, the rules followed by both children and adults, the idea that the teacher is to be actively involved and must at times intervene by imposing her adult perception on the children's realities as they move about the class area in their self-selected activities. This relationship between the adult's perception and the child's reality is a very delicate one; it is the relationship of two disparate realities which, as I previously insisted, must mesh in order for children and teacher to thrive.

There must be a clear set of adult expectations on which the children can rely, and a consistent adult approach toward children and toward learning which matches the children's needs. The teacher must have some basis for her decisions about when to intervene and some underlying principles that guide how she will intervene. These basic principles vary for every classroom and every teacher and constitute what Doris Smith and I have come to call the "METASTRUCTURE"--the understanding we have of ourselves as adults and of the children with whom we work. It is this underlying awareness which gives consistency and continuity to our actions and thus to the children's experiences.

The metastructure of an educational program is the most difficult thing for an outsider to grasp. It is a very personal system of values and concepts reflecting the teacher's goals for children and the means she chooses to achieve these goals. The fact that it is personal, however, does not imply that it is altogether intuitive or unexplainable, and by no means is it a random conglomeration of theories and ideas which can be discarded or changed easily. It is at once both an orientation that is continually growing as the teacher gains new knowledge and the process by which this knowledge finds application with the children in day-to-day interactions. These day-to-day interactions must be seen within the context of the total length of the program, whether one school year, or as in our case, the first four years of the child's formal schooling. The metastructure of a program may operate on a short-range time line, where gains must be immediately apparent, or on a long-range time line, where obvious short-term gains may be seen as long-term losses and the most important growth is not necessarily the growth which is most easily measured by standardized methods.

It is this dimension of the metastructure which, I believe, makes the difference between the teacher as a paraprofessional--whose actions and interactions must conform to a super-

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ficial, predetermined level and whose competence is measured by short-range gains by an acceptable percentage of her students--and the teacher as a professional. For it is in just this dimension of metastructure that the professional teacher determines what are her values, what are her goals for children, and for what kinds of growth she will hold herself accountable over the longer range of the child's growth as a human being and the broader scope of the child as a person who lives and learns twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, both at school and at home, with other children, with adults, and with the whole world of things and ideas.

Like professional training in other fields, the process by which one acquires the skills and insight required by such a comprehensive approach does not happen quickly, nor is it ever "complete". No amount of reading or discussion can take the place of actual experience with children, of feeling-out the nature of children in relation to one's own nature, the building of a sense of when and how to intervene in a way that truly meets the needs of the situation. Nor do I believe that it is possible to learn whether one's interventions are appropriate when one is alone, without support or feedback. In project after project, where teachers are beginning to change their style of teaching, where they are moving toward greater participation in "decisions regarding the content and the process of learning" for both themselves and the children, the most crucial factor the teachers cite in their success is active, participatory, *educational*--not administrative--field supervision (Silverman and Weikart, 1974). It is with this in mind that I describe my own sincere, if stumbling, attempts to understand the metastructure of Adventure Yard.

When I first came to Adventure Yard as a teaching fellow in September, 1972, I had had some experience in an "open" public middle school (an experiment so unsuccessful in applying what I thought was a wonderful idea that I went back to college to learn why it had failed), an open preschool yard at Pacific Oaks, and a free school. I now found myself in a program that seemed to work much better than the other two schools I had been in, but it took me over a semester to finally understand why and to become fully operant in the program. It took me that long to understand the metastructure of the program.

And that was because the metastructure--the underlying understanding of how, why, and when--was mostly in Doris's head. It seemed highly personal--a reflection of who Doris is and the teaching style she has developed over the years. But it was something else as well, something more than one person's intuitive gift for teaching; it was accessible knowledge that could be learned by others, that could be learned by me and translated into my own style, not just copied in an attempt to be another Doris.

The problem was not one of structure; there was plenty of structure in the yard. There was structure provided by the environment and the way we used it in a free-flow between indoors and outdoors for most of the day. There was the structure provided by the rules. Some were clear--rules about hitting, throwing things, and teasing. Others were ambiguous--uses of materials, foul language, when children's spontaneous improvisations were acceptable or unacceptable, how "high" they could be allowed to get in chasing games or fantasy play or in being silly, how much time should two children spend arguing over the same piece of wood, how much to insist a child cleaned up at clean-up time. I was never sure. The expectations might seem clear in the abstract; *children should all help clean up*. But there were times when limits were not set that I thought ought to be set, not enforced when I expected them to be. There were times, it seemed, when the children's limit-pushing was actually approved of. Very confusing!

The structure of the daily plan *was* clear. This was the list of things we provided for the children to do each day in addition to the things in the yard that were always available to them. I knew that there needed to be a number of various kinds of activities that would provide a certain level of involvement for the children for most of the morning. I had lots of ideas. But Doris had a set of criteria by which she determined whether or not my ideas were suitable. Some she thought would work; some she was sure would not. This was also very confusing because I didn't know what these criteria were. "Where are these kids?" she would ask. "How much of what you want to do will they *really* understand?" And she meant it. I would get very excited about sharing with the children abstractions that interested me. At the time I was especially fascinated by marine biology and geology, how mountains were formed under the sea and you could see the layers all folded and crumpled sticking out of the bare hillsides. I wanted to take them hiking; I wanted to make models of synclines; I wanted..."Wait," she would say. "Peel it back, peel it back. You assume they will understand it the way you do. They have no conception of something that they can't see happening. They have no real concept of time so they wouldn't believe you if you said mountains began in the ocean long ago. They won't be interested, or they'll just nod their heads and say 'uh-huh' but they won't believe you and they won't have really learned anything." She was usually right. I could tell by the way children responded if I had gotten an idea "peeled back" to the place where it made sense to them in their own frame of reference. The fossil hunt we went on in Topanga Canyon meant a lot to the children. Some of the older children knew that the shells we were finding on the hillside were from underwater animals and they wondered how they got in those rocks. All of them, even the youngest, were ecstatic when they found something anybody thought was a "fossil." They brought them back, glued them to a sheet of cardboard, and carefully labeled them "Clam," "Snail," etc.

Our Sunday night staff meetings were intense, as enthusiastic student teachers brought in ideas--their own and the children's--and we mercilessly hammered them into a form the children could grasp and manipulate or we gave them up for the moment. "You say he wants to build an A-bomb at school. What do you think he means by an 'A-bomb'? Does he have any idea what that really is or does he mean a big explosion? He's probably more interested in something that goes Ka-boom than in a pea and toothpick demonstration of nuclear fission, which is concrete, but is it what he's really interested in?"

Limit-setting, planning activities, interactions between children and other children, between children and adults--there was so much. I got exhausted trying to understand it. I decided to suspend judgment and wait while soaking up what I could. I had come because there was something new to learn and, indeed, what was happening was so different that it sometimes conflicted with what I thought I already knew. But most of it was incomprehensible.

I knew that whatever the underlying criteria Doris used were, they had to do with the psychology of Jean Piaget, for she kept referring to his theories and became excited when something a child did reminded her of something she'd read in his books. I had read a little about him, found his ideas about children very interesting, very humanistic. But what this meant to my functioning with the children every day I didn't know. It was still all in Doris's head. She appreciated Piaget because he explained things that she had sensed all along in children. I hadn't had that much experience.

So I began reading--books about Piaget, books by Piaget--and I kept listening. I began to hear children say things similar to those he had described. One of his concepts, I found, proved helpful in deciding what to plan for Tuesday's cooking/measuring math activity. I remember clearly the day it clicked. The underlying metastructure was in *my* head too. I told Liz Prescott, with whom I was taking a course in planning environments for children. She said, more or less, "There's always a structure. Most often in schools it's imposed on the children's external behavior and they have to line up, sit at desks, and be on a page in a workbook. When the structure is in the teacher's head, the children themselves can move more freely."

That was just one flash of understanding that I had--the first big one. My understanding continues to grow as I learn more about myself, about these children, about child development, about the process of becoming a teacher, which I observe in other student teachers. Writing this has helped me to see what I do every day in far greater perspective than if I had left all these ideas unspoken, for I can now see much more clearly how they all fit together. I'm finding that my own concept of metastructure is much more coherent than I had realized. I'm finding that I am becoming much surer about what I want to do with the children next fall. I'm feeling very good about who I am as a teacher. And that makes the process of defining the metastructure a very valuable one, not just an academic exercise.

The Role of Metastructure in the Redefinition of Authority

The metastructure, then, has to do with our goals for the children--our educational objectives, if you will--and the methods we have designed to achieve them. It is a coherent plan, integrating needs of the children socially, emotionally, and physically, as well as academically. Because it is carefully thought-out and translated both into the environment and into our actions as much as possible, it provides a framework within which the children are able to function according to their own inner direction, and we are able to observe and know them, to meet their needs, and to challenge their growing abilities.

It is obvious from the references I have made to Adventure Yard that our expectations for children's behavior are quite different from those held for children in traditional classrooms. If it sounds like a very demanding situation for teachers, that is correct. We have chosen to put ourselves on the line for these children for some very specific reasons, based on the developmental needs of children of this age and on the kinds of human beings we want to help them become.

Through the metastructure, we have sought to change our relationship to the children and our role in their learning; we have sought to redefine ourselves as authority figures in their lives. That's not always easy. We all carry within us years of operating in another system, and whether or not we ourselves ever held authoritarian power over children, that role is still the model for most of our previous experiences. It is not unusual to hear a child berating a teddy bear or a friend in the same words and tone her parent or teacher has used to control her behavior the previous minute or week. It's not unusual to hear myself saying some long-forgotten phrase of scorn or anger, then to wish I had never said it, and to wonder if I ought to be here doing the same old thing to these children. If it takes a long time to learn wholly new concepts of teaching, it takes even longer to unlearn old patterns of relating. Ultimately, both the learning and the unlearning are worth the effort.

Herein lies a warning: the experiences the children and teachers have in Adventure Yard go far beyond the typical school relationships with their narrow range of acceptable feelings. Having taken the lid off, thus enabling feelings to go higher, the converse--the unacceptable--also applies at times. In a relaxed atmosphere where children can feel good about themselves and know they are accepted for who they are, not who they are supposed to be, they may show sides of themselves that aren't so positive or creative. (Nobody can be creative all the time!) Angry feelings come out; pain is not suppressed; grievances must be heard; regressive behavior crops up. These are all parts of growing children. They are parts of us all.

The airing of all these feelings takes time, energy, and commitment. Not every teacher would want to cope with all of this. It's important to warn open classroom enthusiasts that there are negative as well as positive ramifications, so that they can make realistic decisions about whether or not they can make such a commitment of their lives. The only teacher that I know of who has written about this is George Dennison in his *Lives of Children* (1969). Unfortunately, because Dennison's students were mostly poor minority children in New York's lower east side, it's very easy to assume that it is their slum background that is responsible for all the passionate interactions. *Children* are passionate, though six or seven years in the middle class may drive the passion underground to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the individual. I myself believe that outbursts of feeling are more healthy than passive withdrawal.

Either school is a safe place where children know they are accepted, or it isn't. As teachers, we either mean that or we don't. Cullum summed it up in *The Geranium on the Windowsill Just Died But Teacher You Went Right On* (1971, p. 42):

> *I'm so quiet sitting in the first row, first seat.*
> *I feel you like me.*
> *I mind and I am never late.*
> *Do you like me?*
> *I always do all of my homework,*
> *and I gave you the biggest valentine of all.*
> *Do you like me?*
> *Sometimes I'm scared of you though.*
> *The way you look, the way you smile.*
> *But that's when you like me best of all--*
> *When I'm scared.*

I have emphasized that there must be adult authority in the open classroom, and we, as teachers, must represent it. But we have chosen to give up our right to impose it through fear, through rejection of the child as a worthwhile human being, and through the maintenance of that safe distance from which teachers must always be right, whether they are or not. Even as a last resort. That's one of the incredible things about Adventure Yard children with their vast experience in teaching teachers. They know that they have a right to expect more from adults than that and they refuse to put up with any backsliding.

Applying Piaget in the Classroom (and How *Not* to Apply Him)

I have implied that the metastructure of Adventure Yard is an application of Piaget's developmental psychology to the open classroom. His research has demanded that we take another look at the way we exercise our authority in the cognitive and social/emotional/ethical realms. There are two points I wish to emphasize concerning the way I believe Piaget should be applied in the classroom.

First, although I have repeatedly said that it is necessary for the adult to remain in authority in the open classroom, I have much to say about the value of attaining the greatest possible reciprocity between myself as adult and the children. These attitudes are not contradictory, though they may at first seem so. Reciprocity has to do with respect which flows in two directions. It is still possible for a child--or anyone--to have respect for an authority who also respects *him*. It is the unquestioning acceptance of unilateral authority which Piaget sees as a great threat to the world's future.

Second, I have stated that there is more than one reality involved in any classroom, that there are the realities of the society, parents, teachers, and children. It is in pointing out this gap between the reality of children and the reality of adults that Piaget has made such a great contribution to education. "The characteristics of the childish mentality (have) a functional significance that defines a genuine activity." The task of the teacher is two-fold: she must value that genuine activity and see that it grows and expresses itself to the fullest; at the same time she must begin to direct that activity and the reality of the child into a harmony with the reality of the adult society into which the child must grow, without destroying the individuality of that child, and without eliminating everything different which this individual--now still a child--might someday contribute toward a creative solution to one of the world's unsolved problems.

I have attempted to set down some of the significant characteristics of this different reality of the child and what I think are some of its implications for my manner of teaching. For the purposes of discussion, I have divided the material into two parts--the cognitive and the social/emotional/ethical. If this division at times seems arbitrary or unclear, that is precisely because these two realms cannot be separated in the lives of real children, although most schools try to separate them.

> *...In reality, education constitutes an indissoluble whole, and it is not possible to create independent personalities in the ethical area if the individual is also subjected to intellectual constraint to such an extent that he must restrict himself to learning by rote without discovering the truth for himself.* (Piaget, 1973, p. 107)

This is not the place to begin a detailed discussion of Piaget's theory of cognitive development nor to set forth all the aspects of the developmental stages which he has defined. In short, there are four major stages: the sensorimotor (birth to two years); the preoperational (two years to seven years); the concrete operational (seven years to eleven years); and the formal operational (eleven years and up). If the discussion of developmental stages is new to the reader, I refer you to *Piaget's Theory of Intellectual Development*, by Ginsburg and Opper (1969). I will mention here only those stages which seem to apply to the children of Adventure Yard (ages five to nine). It is obvious, looking at the four stages, that children in Adventure Yard begin in the second stage and sometime during their four-year stay make the transition to the third. Not only is there a difference between the reality of the children and the reality of the adults in the yard, but there are differing realities among the children themselves.

What implication does the existence of these stages have for our role in promoting children's intellectual development? One might expect a reappraisal of the teacher's traditional function when education is guided by the psychology of a man (Piaget) who, when working for Binet, thought that the wrong answers children gave to I.Q. test questions were much more interesting than the right ones!

First of all, Piaget has reexamined the entire concept that children give "wrong" answers. His classic statement is that *children always answer correctly the question they are asking themselves*. Our problem as teachers is to decide when to allow them to answer their own questions, and when to insist that they begin to consider the questions that *we* think important. And how insistent should we be on getting the "right" answer to *our* question?

Piaget himself has given some thought to this question, and he uses the concept of the stages to give his answer:

> *...In order to understand certain basic phenomena...the child must pass through a certain number of stages characterized by ideas which will later be judged erroneous but which appear necessary in order to reach the final correct solution... Should everything be done to correct the child, or should the idea of active methods induce us to respect the succession of these approximations both in regard to their errors and their educational value? Future educational experiments will have to decide, but for my part I believe there is every advantage in respecting these stages (on condition, of course, of knowing them well enough to be able to judge of their usefulness).* (Piaget, 1973, pp. 21-22)

While this suggests that we accept some "wrong" answers, it does *not* imply that we do not

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"teach" children anything. *How* we should teach them is not always clear. Applications of Piagetian psychology in the classroom can go to two extremes, both of which are equally off-base. At one extreme are those educators who, upon finding, for example, that conservation skills correlate with reading readiness, manufacture lovely plastic kits guaranteed to train children to conserve much more quickly and efficiently than if left to normal, untidy happenstance. The efficiency bugbear raises its ugly head, this time in the guise of a "Piagetian" approach. This is what Piaget calls the "American question":

> *...Should passage from one stage of development be accelerated or not? To be sure, all education, in one way or another, is just such an acceleration, but it remains to be decided to what extent it is beneficial. It is not without significance that it takes man much longer to reach maturity than the other animals. Consequently it is highly probable that there is an optimum rate of development, to exceed or fall behind which would be equally harmful.* (Piaget, 1973, p. 23)

At the other extreme are those who think a Piagetian classroom is the 1970's version of the progressive school, and teachers are present to nurture, not to educate, since, "according to Piaget," learning will happen anyway whatever the children do. I think there are many fewer teachers actually teaching by this model than there are critics who assume that that is what a Piagetian teacher does once she adopts a child-centered approach. Carl Bereiter, a behaviorist, offers a classic example of this kind of assumption:

> *What Piaget's theory does...is provide a license for calling virtually anything a child does, education...Education is* (seen as) *something that goes on within the child. When the concept of education is thus merged with the concept of growth, it follows obviously (and without the need for Piaget's research) that the child's whole life is a process of education and that all his experiences contribute to it. From this conclusion it is then an easy step to the practical position that whatever makes for a good experientially rich life for children is good education; and that, in its most elementary terms is the position of the advocates of informal education.* (Bereiter, 1972, p. 401)

Piaget responds:

> *...Two common misunderstandings, however, have diminished the value of the efforts made in this field (active education) up to now. The first is the fear (and sometimes hope) that the teacher would have no role to play in these experiments and that their success would depend on leaving the students entirely free to work or play as they will. It is obvious that the teacher as organizer remains indispensable in order to create the situations and construct the initial devices which present useful problems to the child. Secondly, he is needed to provide counter-examples that compel reflection and reconsideration of over-hasty solutions.* (Piaget, 1973, p. 16)

He goes on to say that it would be ridiculous to think children can formulate important questions without guidance, considering how many centuries it took science to arrive at "new" math and Einsteinian physics.

It is one thing to help a child refine the question she is asking herself or reexamine an answer she has given hastily or carelessly. It is another thing to train her to give the correct response to 2 + 2 = ___ or "define gravity." Once again it comes to a question of values, of one's goals in educating children.

> *The goal of intellectual education is not to know how to repeat or retain ready-made truths (a truth that is parroted is only a half-truth). It is in learning to master the truth by oneself at the risk of losing a lot of time and going through all the roundabout ways that are inherent in real activity.* (Piaget, 1973, p. 106)

The Role of the Teacher in the Child's Cognitive Development

It is our role as teachers to involve children in--or allow children to involve themselves in--real activity which poses useful problems. The establishment of an environment which presents children with significant problems is one aspect of the teacher's role as *organizer*. The character of her intervention reflects this concern with significant problems:

> *Wait, try that again; what did it do? Will it do that every time? How many*

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> *are there now? If you put so much in at one time, you won't be able to see what happens as well. Please don't bump into us when we're doing an experiment. Hey what would happen if...What other ways could we get it to do that? Can you tell me the rules of your game? What's your plan for that paint? Which places are OK to paint, which aren't? Now that you're finished making that, what do you plan to do next?*

Adventure Yard is a purposeful place. One doesn't always have to have a plan, but often when I ask a child his plan, he'll come up with one off the top of his head and it's such a good idea, he'll go try it. When he tells me he'd like to build a dog house, I can then keep an eye out and introduce a new method of carpentry or watch how he measures the sides and learn a little more about his math skills.

It is our role as teachers to serve as *sounding boards* for children, to reflect back to them their ideas to see if that's really what they think, or if it's just an off-hand explanation or an old way of thinking that they might want to revise now. This is perhaps the most difficult task--involving that tricky question about whether to correct the child or to consider this error a necessary step in reaching the final solution much later. It is possible to demand of a child clear thinking that is appropriate to her stage of logical development without forcing upon her the fact that her conception of the world is "wrong" by adult standards.

A continuous negation of the child's ideas can only make her extremely reluctant to say what she thinks at school and uncomfortable at the possibility that the only way she has to organize and understand her world is not any good according to this large, all-knowing grown-up. R.D. Laing (1967, 1971, 1972) has had much to say about the adverse effects of *invalidation*--the process whereby others continually deny the worth of one's thoughts, feelings, or ideas. He worked with schizophrenics.

> *We don't think you're crazy.*
> *You shouldn't get angry.*
> *Nobody is talking about you behind your back...*

Consider adults' words to children:

> *Go to sleep. There are no monsters coming through the cracks in the wall!*
> *Little boys don't cry.*
> *Little girls don't fight.*
> *That isn't an emerald; it's a lump of green glass. We'll get a geologist to come and prove it to you.* (This is from my own childhood.)

What is the nature of the child's reality that makes this issue so significant? Most important perhaps is the fact that the preoperational child (ages two to seven) believes that adults are all-knowing and all-powerful. Elkind quotes Edmund Gosse's account of the moment when, at six years of age, he realized that his father did not know everything:

> *...my father came in and announced some fact to us. I was standing on the rug gazing at him, and when he made his statement I remember turning quickly in embarrassment and looking into the fire. The shock to me was that of a thunderbolt, for what my father had said was not true...Here was the appalling discovery, never suspected before, that my father was not as God, and did not know everything. The shock was not caused by my suspicion that he was not telling the truth as it appeared to him, but the awful proof that he was not, as I had supposed, omniscient.* (Elkind, 1970, p. 29)

Fortunately, as in the example, this belief in adult omniscience is soon left behind, but there is the possibility of two or so years in school when its grasp on the child's mind is still firm, and the child must struggle with the mystery of the one right answer that the teacher will accept when all the others that come to mind are so much more interesting.

It is also characteristic of the child's logic at this stage that everything in the world is made by and for people (God being a superperson who can do things if regular people can't--a sort of catch-all cause referred to even by children from nonreligious homes--Elkind, 1970). All things that are in the world are caused by somebody for some reason pertinent to human beings, and these reasons are known by grown-ups. When this world view began to break down for one small child, he asked, "Mommy, why is there such a lot of things in the world if no one knows all these things?" (Elkind, 1970). In answer to their questions, children will sometimes prefer to hear that people die in order to make room for new people, rather than physiological details which they can't comprehend since they can't begin to imagine a time when they will not be. The same holds for sex and human reproduction. "Where did I come from?" may be most accurately answered by "Arizona," as the old joke says. There is snow for children to play in, and the sun follows them around to give them light.

In our advanced Piaget class at Pacific Oaks, and later in the workshop our class gave for the public, some very intense discussions arose concerning what we tell children when they ask us a question and we know the "truth" is not going to make sense within the logical framework their developmental level permits. It became obvious that there were times when children wanted to know "why?" not from an interest in objective, external reality, but from an inner need to form connections between themselves and the world around them. The two greatest concerns that parents, teachers, and students voiced were: 1) if they told a part-truth or a story that satisfied the child at this level, would the child remember this as a deception later and suspect the adult of falseness in other matters? (the credibility gap conundrum); and 2) within themselves as adults, was it compromising their own integrity to answer with less than the truth as they saw it?

One of the most useful techniques for dealing with questions of this nature is to ask the child what *she* thinks. At a preoperational level, she will usually be glad to tell you because basically she already has an idea and just wonders if you agree with her. Once again we are face-to-face with the necessity of deciding what to do with the child's errors. I believe it is sometimes important to let them stand, even though by doing so it may look to outsiders as if you, as teacher, are not doing your job (that is, if they conceive your job to be that of the expert who is supposed to impose ready-made truths on the children).

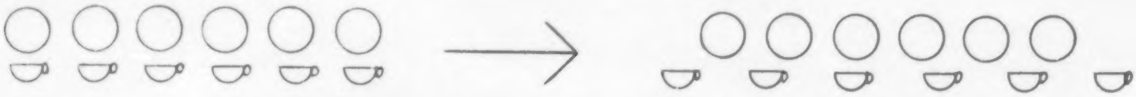
The kinds of questions that children of five and six years are beginning to ask--about the physical world, amounts, number, space, and time--often reflect things children have heard on television about, for example, the space age, pollution, and over-population. The vocabulary they use is so sophisticated that adults may think the questions are much more complex than they actually are to the child. Elkind gives the example of his five-year-old asking, "If we keep driving, will we come to the end of the earth?" His father resisted telling him the earth was round because the roundness of the earth is not something that is known to most of us by direct perception. A few hundred years ago, somebody became convinced that certain evidence combined with logical deduction led to the conclusion of round instead of flat, though to everyone else, for a very long time, it looked flat enough to make them wonder if they wanted this nut to use their boats (or so legend has it). Elkind's compromise was to reply to his son, "When you come to the end of the land there is water and when you come to the end of the water you arrive at some more land." This is true. It also has the advantage of not asking the child to believe something his direct perception denies. Unless he has been an astronaut, he has not seen that the earth is a sphere (Elkind, 1970, p. 32).

Actually, my final court of appeal in this matter of answering children's questions with the "truth" is Albert Einstein. In *The Evolution of Physics* he writes:

> *Physical concepts are free creations of the human spirit, and are not, however it may seem, uniquely determined by the external world. In our endeavor to understand reality we are somewhat like a man trying to understand the mechanism of a closed watch...He may form some picture of a mechanism which could be responsible for all the things he observes, but he may never be quite sure his picture is the only one which could explain his observations. He will never be able to compare his picture with the real mechanism...But he certainly believes that, as his knowledge increases, his picture of reality will become simpler and simpler and will explain a wider and wider range of his sensuous impressions. He may also believe in the existence of the ideal limit of knowledge and that this is approached by the human mind. He may call this ideal limit objective Truth.* (Einstein and Infeld, 1938, p. 31)

At least in matters pertaining to the whys and the hows of the universe, we are saved from the necessity of telling children "the whole truth and nothing but the truth," because the ultimate truth is unobtainable.

What does this have to do with Piaget? What does it have to do with children? Einstein's description of the history of physics reminds me of Piaget's theory of the development of thinking in children. One sees how new physical concepts are born in the painful struggle with old ideas. When the mind finds old concepts too confining, it replaces them with new ones. Einstein should know. It was the force of his logic working upon all the knowledge of science before him that created a picture of the universe so different that most of us don't even know we don't understand it. According to him, the most important task of science has been to divorce our understanding of physical phenomena from what we *think* we see. "Intuitive conclusions based on immediate observation are not always to be trusted." The process is the same, whether it is used by physicists attempting to reduce the optical phenomena of light waves to an explanation consistent with the mechanical world view prevailing at the time ("The difficulties in solving this problem are so great that we have to give it up and thus give up the mechanical view as well.") or by a child just beginning to conserve number. Louise Derman-Sparks' classic example is of the child who, happily secure in the "mustness" of her perception, had, for a long period of time, insisted when Louise spread out over a larger space the row of six cups which had been arranged one-to-one below six saucers thus:



that there were now more cups than saucers. One day, however, she said, "There are more cups." Then she counted the cups and came up with "six." She looked again and pushed all the objects away from her, saying, "I don't like these things anymore." There comes a time for the child when her skills in logic and reasoning have grown strong enough to combat her perception. Even though she is still able to grasp only one aspect at a time of what she perceives--that the line of cups is longer than the line of saucers and therefore looks like more--and without taking the space between them into account, she is also aware that six is still six.

This child is in transition from a preoperational understanding of conservation of number to a concrete operational understanding. What this means is that the old way of perceiving "reality" is in conflict with the new one that is growing, and through this conflict, the old reality is breaking down. Transitions take place not only in the understanding of conservation but also in other logical operations; in other words, such times of transition occur frequently during this time from age five to age nine. In fact, conservation of volume doesn't even *begin* until the child is eleven or twelve (Ginsburg and Opper, 1969, p. 165). From the response of the girl in the example one can get an idea of the tension and discomfort that are involved in this changing of realities. Tenseness and irritability are sometimes cues to look for the occurrence of a transition. It may then be timely for the teacher to ask a probing question to point out the discrepancy in the child's old logic, and this, if the time is right, may help the child break out of her old pattern and into the new one. If she is truly ready, she will say, "There are six cups and six saucers, so there *must* be the same number."

The *mustness* of this interpretation is a key factor in our knowing how to confront the child's conclusion--or whether we will confront her at all if the conclusion is erroneous. Piaget calls this mustness the "feeling of necessity." There are times when a child is not sure. In probing, you, the teacher, can see how firm in her mind the perception that there is, for example, more clay in the ball when it is rolled into a snake than there was when it was a ball-shaped amount. How firm this perception is indicates how firmly she is in the preoperational stage in conservation of substance. Any attempt to convince her that she is wrong and you are right at this time will lead, at most, to a passive agreement, and even if you teach her the proper words, like a magic formula, she can repeat them and maybe give you the "right" answer about the clay ball and the clay snake next time you ask. But try it the next time you are making cookies and ask her if she should let her friend have the ball of dough rolled into the snake and take the dough ball for herself, and you will discover her true beliefs on the subject.

These may seem like very specific issues, but they are indicative, if Piaget is correct, of a total world view of the child--"a coherent, integrated mode of thinking, perceiving, and reaction." The transition from the preoperational to the concrete operational stage is particularly relevant to us if we are teaching any grade level from kindergarten to third. The transition from concrete to formal operations is important in grade six through high school. One characteristic of these transitions is that they do not occur instantly. Perhaps, if you are fortunate, you will be with a child when she makes the final switch from one stage to the next in a particular logical operation. Imagine Louise's small friend counting and saying, "There are only six. They are the same number." You say, "But look, the cups go further." She will reply, "Oh, look, they're further apart!" If you pursue it further, she will wonder what *your* problem is, and, if a week later you bring out the cups and saucers again, they will be not only "cinchy" but "dumb" and she will think you are dumb too, if you think she didn't always know that.

Possibly the greatest danger in an intervention of this sort is the temptation to say to the child, "But look, they're further apart," in an attempt to help, to speed things up.

She may have seen this and so be able to agree with you, but you've just upstaged her and taken for yourself what should have been her discovery, her wonderful idea. (Read "The Having of Wonderful Ideas" by Eleanor Duckworth, 1972, for more information about what to do--and what not to do--at this crucial moment.) It may seem more efficient to "help" in this way, but it totally misses the point of the child's making her own discoveries--if not today, then tomorrow. Even if you aren't there when it hits her, she may come and tell you afterwards--and after all, it's her discovery, she made it, and she should tell it. And if you know what to look for, you will be aware of her new way of thinking soon enough.

(Some Passing Comments on History and Science)

In planning curriculum, it is very helpful to keep in mind the child's conception of historical time and geographical space. An example of children's perception of historical time came up during a discussion of deep sea exploration with children in the second and third grades--children whom one might expect to "know better." We'd discussed what kinds of materials one would need to use to build a submarine that went to the deepest part of the Marianas Trench. The children speculated what would be invented in the future to withstand such great pressures, and then decided that in two hundred years people would have evolved enough not to need equipment to live under water. After all, we have told them that things change over time and they have heard that people have evolved from something like an ape. And two hundred years seems like a long time. When I asked them what they thought people were like two hundred years *before* now, they said they had no idea. I reminded them of the Revolutionary War and that that was two hundred years ago. Had they seen any pictures of that? No, they didn't remember any. How about George Washington? he was the general in that war. Oh, yeah. He's on a stamp and on one dollar bills. He looked like us, but had his hair different and wasn't there something about him having wooden false teeth? Yup. False teeth have changed a lot in two hundred years, but that's no time at all compared to all the time people have been changing from their anthropoid ancestors. I'm not sure I understand that myself.

In both history and science, one of the main issues for children is the transformational character of the world. Things are always changing, yet some things only *appear* to change while remaining essentially the same. Elkind, a theorist who has given much thought to the use of Piaget in the classroom, states:

> *It is perhaps fair to say that education tends to focus upon the static aspects of reality rather than upon its dynamic transformations. The child is taught how and what things are but not the conditions under which they change or remain the same. And yet the child is constantly confronted with change and alteration. His view of the world alters as he grows in height and perceptual acuity. And the world changes...People change, too...The child receives a static formal education while living in a world in transition.* (Elkind, 1970, p. 14)

I found my understanding of conservation enhanced a great deal when Elkind pointed out that conservation is, in essence, the child's discovery of permanence across apparent change. The alterations in the level of liquid when poured from one shape of glass to another, of the ball of clay rolled into a snake, are only *apparent*; underlying them is a permanent amount of liquid, of clay, and knowledge of this fact can only be gotten from within by the use of reason and logic--through the child's mental actions upon these things. "Yes, it's higher in the glass, but the glass is thinner. You didn't put any other liquid in and you didn't spill any. It *must* be the same." (Elkind, 1970, pp. 4-5).

> *We can help the child deal with the transformational character of his world both by providing the relevant forms of activity--allowing him to perform transformations of various kinds--and by engaging him with questions about states and transformations.* (Elkind, 1970, p. 6)

If anyone challenges you as to the academic merits of cooking in your classroom, let them have it about transformations. Joyce Robinson's[2] favorite story is about the child who

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[2] Joyce Robinson teaches in the Early Learning Center at the Pasadena Alternative School. She was a fellow member of Louise Derman-Sparks' Advanced Piaget class during the Spring of 1974.

watched her mother prepare a custard pie. "That's not custard, it's soup." Unfortunately, Joyce says, the child had to leave before the pie came out of the oven.

We have been inventing recipes at school and then analyzing why the brownies came out gooey--not enough flour, too much liquid, too much oil--or why they were so dry, or why they stayed flat, or got burned. Children can predict transformations which will take place when food is heated. They can plan the outcome to suit their tastes. Everybody is very interested.

Most of this discussion of cognitive development has focused on the needs of the preoperational children in the program. The needs of concrete operational children are somewhat different, especially in respect to the kind of responses they want adults to give to the questions they ask. That excellent tactic with preoperational children--to ask what the child herself thinks is the answer--often backfires with the older children. Tim tells me, "When I ask *you*, don't you ask *me*!" He is obviously beyond the stage of wanting to know the personal whys of the universe. He is usually after some solid information. He is willing to be referred to resource books or the library information number or any other reference we can think of--the zoo, the police department, city hall, Sue's father. If I can't serve him as expert, we find one together and then take whatever it might say with a grain of salt. Because he no longer believes adults are infallible, he no longer believes everything he is told.

I point out his errors in spelling, math, and reasoning, and he in turn is only too glad to point out mine. As children move into the concrete operational stage, the relationship between them and the teacher can become much more reciprocal. The children are first-rate problem solvers, and after two years with them I'm getting much better at it myself. An active education flows both ways. Reciprocal. It's nice.

However, it's not always so nice. Sometimes I have to step in and "be the adult in the situation" when there are limits that must be observed or when the children are totally unable to solve problems among themselves. Piaget's psychology has proved helpful in providing insights into what's happening for children in these interactions as well as in cognitive academic situations.

The Role of the Teacher in the Child's Social/Emotional/Ethical Development

In the social/emotional/ethical area--how children relate to each other, to limits in the environment, and to adults--there are several concepts which Piaget has described that are helpful for the adult in the open classroom. The issues are the child's egocentricity, her changing perception of adults, her conceptions of causality and intention, and her understanding of the rules of the game. I have already discussed the changes in affect that may take place when a child is in a transition from one stage in logical thinking to another. Once again, it is obvious that the child's growth in thinking and feeling are so closely interwoven that it is impossible to separate them in practice.

Developmental psychology as a whole has had a great deal to say about the characteristics of the "school-age child" (five to twelve years of age). Yet these characteristics seem to have been overlooked in the design of most educational systems--perhaps because, as Piaget pointed out, the prevailing image of the child has been "as a little man to be instructed, given morals, and identified as rapidly as possible with its adult models" (Piaget, 1969). What else could be responsible for the drastic change which occurs in the transition from kindergarten to first grade in most schools?

There is a long tradition of understanding the problems stemming from developmental needs which are faced by preschool-age children. In fact, much of the preschool and kindergarten curriculum involves just that--children learning to leave their families and get along with their peers, to grow more sure of themselves in the world outside their homes. First grade is another ballgame, however. The curriculum is academic, and all else must be subordinate to the acquisition of basic reading and math skills. But what is happening to children *emotionally* at this age?

According to many sources in child psychology, children at this age are "striving to conform to social restrictions without sacrificing their growing sense of individuality and independence" (Pietropinto, 1974, p. 80). They are learning "that they can defy adult authority and still survive" (Stone and Church, 1973, p. 364). They have begun--and only just begun--to move beyond the magical thinking of the young child, which assumes punishment of transgressions either by tigers and monsters or through the immanent justice by which the stove burns you if you disobey your mother and touch it anyway. They now no longer see parents as infallible. Or teachers either. This is a whole new world view for a child who, a short time ago, believed all wisdom resided in his parents. Children are passionately interested (some much more than others) in the limits that restrict them, and no matter how few we impose, there are some who will find ways to exceed them, forcing us to respond--and then take great joy in outrunning or outwitting us. When confronted with an accusation, they are capable of flatly insisting--and believing--that they did not do what you just saw them do. Or, using the magic of words and the letter of the law, they will argue, "You said not to run. I was *galloping*." Much of this information comes from a child psychology text by Stone and Church, the chapter on the middle years of six through twelve. It reads as if it were written from direct observation of Adventure Yard. Maybe this indicates we've got what we set out to get--a setting where children are free to be their developmentally appropriate selves.

For it is in just this area of relationship between themselves and adults that important growth is happening for children of this age. It is something we expect to have helped them resolve in a healthy way by the *end* of this period of development. An important part of the learning experience we provide for them should be the chance to explore and make this resolution. It is not something we expect them to arrive with in kindergarten, or achieve immediately upon arriving--though we can force them to comply with our limits. But not, perhaps, if we want them to grow into adults capable of respecting legitimate authority and able to distinguish between that and false or immoral uses of power. Again we come back to the ultimate goals of education and the value placed on developing certain aspects of human potential and not others.

It is Doris Smith's hypothesis, derived from Piaget's work on affectivity, that not only do young children *think* differently than do adults, but they *feel* differently as well. I keep finding this out the hard way. In the discussion of intellectual aspects of the child's development, I stated that preoperational children believe that all things are caused by somebody for some reason. There is no room in such a world view for accidents. Intent may lie with the person who made the thing or event, or it may be part of the thing itself. Acorns falling from trees do so with *intention*, and if one falls on your five-year-old head, it does so with malice aforethought, so you may rightfully direct your anger to it or to the tree. When it comes to other *people*, the same view applies. Consequently, "I'm sorry" doesn't hold much water at this age; "I didn't do it on purpose" may be begrudgingly accepted under duress, but all the time the victim *knows* you really *meant* to do it. Arguments of this sort arise between even the best of friends. It's not a deficiency in basic trust.

Last year a first and a second grader were cleaning off the potter's wheel. They *began* to clean it off, but then got interested in riding the sponge around in the clayey water on the spinning wheel, and watching the water spray out. Tod lost his grip on the sponge and it flew off, hitting Phil in the chest. Phil was furious at this *deliberate* affront to his person, and nothing would convince him of Tod's innocence.

Children in the preoperational stage believe that the sun and moon follow *them* around, and that snow falls for them to play in (and for no other reason). For the young child, everything does indeed center on and revolve around him. It is impossible for him to imagine that another person has a point of view different from his own. This is the sense in which Piaget uses the word "egocentrism." It is very difficult, if not impossible, for a child before the age of six or seven to know what in his fund of knowledge comes from himself and what comes from another (Piaget, 1965, p. 57).

Until I realized where in this developmental sequence he was, Kip, a kindergartner, almost drove his friends--and me--nuts with his impatience and anger at our failing to carry out his orders. One day, while trying to build a fort out of a large piece of cardboard--which was to be leaned against the fence--he drove away his last friend, who had finally tired of being insulted and harassed. I arrived and stepped in to see what the problem was and to interpret to him why Mark had gone. I also tried to help him put up the cardboard, but his idea of help was to tell me to put it where he wanted it, and when I stuck it up in what seemed to me to be the most obviously fort-like position, he yelled at me, "No, you dummy, why don't you do it like I say?" (He hadn't said.) Obviously he had a picture in his mind of how it was to be and I, in doing it differently, was both stupid *and* purposefully, rebelliously, and stubbornly thwarting him because I must *know* how he wanted it. Why don't you do it, *Stupid*?! I left him with his cardboard--finally the way he wanted it--saying I thought Mark left because he didn't like to be yelled at and I didn't like it either. I *didn't* know what his idea was, and I had cooperated only in such a way that he had to stop and explain in words or gestures how it was he wanted the fort built, getting *him* to do most of it in the process. I really liked him a lot more after that and actually enjoyed his rampant egocentricism in a yard where most of the children had begun to soften a little and could be counted on to eventually acknowledge another's viewpoint, whether or not they would buy that it counted as much as their own.

This is the age when, in the child's eye, adults begin to slip from their omniscient pedestals. Remember Gosse's revelation that his father was not perfect, and imagine, if you can, the far-reaching consequences such a realization must have in the life of a child. There is a wonderful book, written by Judith Viorst with much help from her sons, that begins:

> *My mama says there isn't any mean-eyed monster with long slimy hair and pointy claws going scritchy-scratch-scritchy-scratch outside my window. But yesterday my mama said I couldn't have some cream cheese on my sandwich, because, she said, there wasn't any more. And then I found the cream cheese under the lettuce in back of the Jello. So...sometimes even mamas make mistakes.* (Viorst, 1973, unnumbered)

This book is most enjoyed by children firmly in the stage where they are sure they have *always* known how often adults make mistakes. At that age they relish this book. They gloat over it, eyes shining triumphantly. It gives them even *more* satisfaction to hear it twice in a row. Younger children, who still believe in grown-ups, may also tend to be apprehensive about the possibility of monsters, and miss the intent of the book entirely.

The older children are great fun, as long as you have a sense of humor. Everything you do or say may be used against you, and don't be surprised if a child will go to great lengths to outsmart you and then rub it in by telling you exactly *how* he outsmarted you. Although I've warned them that by telling me they've shot that ploy and it won't work the next time, still they can't resist rubbing it in, and besides, they are infinitely confident that next time they will think of something even better. They usually do.

Beware of explaining to such a child something he already knows. He believes that he has always known it and only an idiot would not know that he knows. Beware of giving him a long explanation of a math operation he already thinks he knows because he will claim you got him all mixed-up. Elkind terms this tendency "cognitive conceit."

He also has a term--"assumptive realities"--that describes what happens when you, the adult, *are* right, and the child refuses to admit it. Children do not know how they learned what they know. Concrete operational children (ages seven to twelve) have a newly acquired ability--to reason from assumptions and hypotheses. Unfortunately, it is not until the *next* stage, formal operations, that they are able to make the distinction between an assumption and empirical fact. They make their assumptions on the basis of limited information, and even when faced with new evidence which may contradict their hypotheses, they may not accept it (Elkind, 1970, chapter 4).

Do not suppose that these attitudes, out in the open in some open classrooms, are a product of such settings. They are age-old.[3] Think back and remember if you didn't think most adults were dumb, whether or not you were allowed to say so. I prefer the relationship I have with Tim to being called "Ms. Carney" and getting "Yes, ma'am; no, ma'am" from a seething child who is convinced I am wrong. Neither of us gets to verify our impressions that way. Reciprocity.

The rules adults impose on children are one thing. The rules children use in their games are another matter entirely. Piaget has written an immense book, *The Moral Judgment of the Child* (1965), with the rules they use at marbles as his basic starting point. It is in these kinds of interactions that he believes the true moral development of the child takes place--much more so here than in the child's interactions with the rules imposed on her by adults.

Thus far I have described the attitude toward adults and adult rules held by children in the concrete operations stage--that is, children who are able to see that adults make mistakes and don't know everything. This is in direct contrast to the preoperational child who believes adults know everything, caused everything, and made up all the rules--not just for the games children play ("My daddy made up the rules of marbles. He's older than my grandfather; he's older than God."--Piaget, 1965, p. 55), but also the rules for the sun's going to bed as well as one's own bedtime. Not only are adults seen as all-knowing, all-powerful, but the rules they make are absolute, unquestioned, sacred.

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[3] *Ah, there's too much of that sending to school in these days! It only does harm. Every gatepost and barn's door you come to is sure to have some bad word or other chalked upon it by the young rascals. If they'd never been taught how to write they wouldn't have been able to scribble such villainy. Their fathers couldn't do it and the country was all the better for it.* (Hardy, 1895, p. 113)

In *The Moral Judgment of the Child* (1965), Piaget describes the young child's attitudes toward rules--one matter--and her *adherence* to rules--another matter entirely. The two coincide in a very odd way with an adult's way of thinking. Very young children regard rules as mystical in nature. They were from the beginning. (Note that believing in the adult origin of rules does not conflict with the belief that the rules are timeless; the child's parent is seen as ageless.) Mystically unalterable though they may be to the child, she doesn't seem to trouble herself to obey them and fails to attribute the least importance to the most serious of infringements. This is in part because the child tends to believe there is a rule to sanction everything she does; because she is unaware of the source of ideas that come to her, she often believes that this idea of taking two turns since she just won the last round of cards is a rule that has always been there, and she has simply *remembered* it (Piaget, 1965, p. 57).

In regard to adult-imposed rules, the difference between a kindergartner (preoperational) and a second grader (concrete operational) is this: when the kindergartners break a rule, each will say of the other, "She told me to," and they honestly believe that the other person made them; the older children own themselves as the source of their actions, often with pride. Breaking adult rules is not to the concrete operational child a moral matter, but a challenging adventure in seeing just how inept these adults really are and whether or not she will get caught. With little kids, it's always somebody else's idea, so it must have been all right. They present their case with a sense of innocence led astray, good intentions, honor, and dignity! Until I read Piaget's work on the moral judgment of the child, I used to find it incomprehensible that these children, engaged in such an obviously off-limits activity, such as painting obscenities on the wall of the classroom, could stand before my wrath with calm self-assurance and accuse each other, "It was her idea." As though that should completely exonerate them and totally excuse them from all responsibility for their actions. Sputter, sput!

Piaget to the rescue...

> *The little child cannot differentiate between the impulses of his personal fancy and the rules imposed from above.*
>
> *The egocentric child distorts the influence of external constraint in terms of his subjectivity, but he does not distinguish the part played by his subjectivity from that played by environmental pressure. From the intellectual point of view, he does not distinguish between external and internal, subjective and objective. From the point of view of action, he yields to every suggestion.* (Piaget, 1965, p. 95)

The memory of each of us, secure in our own realities, gazing across the gap at the other in perplexity--"Why is my teacher so upset?" and "Why does this child act as though she's done nothing wrong?"--is quite hilarious to me now. The only way to deal with such an obvious waste of energy is to laugh at it after the fact and vow to do better. That's not to say that next time I would not again insist that they scrub the offending words off the wall. I would. And I would probably just as freely indicate my anger, since they know I'm angry whether I say so or not and double messages do no one any service. But I would save my moral indignation. In matters of this nature, no one regards such actions as moral or immoral except the misguided teacher.

Right and wrong in a moral or ethical sense, which applies to one's own actions as well as the actions of others, is an aspect of adult thought and feeling, not of children's logic. It is the ultimate attainment of the decentered mature personality, and the opposite of the egocentric world view of the child, which will see every question of justice from its own point of view for many years.

That is not to say that we are not responsible for the development of this moral sense in children. It is only to say that we must not expect to see children operate by it in the primary grades. Because we don't get direct feedback from changes in the children's responses to the rules we impose, it's very hard to know whether the steps we take in this area are of any benefit to the child. The most effective criterion I have for myself in this area is the one of reciprocity; I try to apply a sense of right and wrong to my own actions in relation to the children, and never present myself to them as someone who must always be regarded as right because of my status as an adult and my role as a teacher. It is a modeling procedure; they can see that I will reevaluate my actions in light of their perception of the situation, and that for me justice isn't just *because I say so.* There are times when I will say, "I'm sorry I had to make you stop working yesterday. I understand why you wanted to finish your construction." I must also clarify, "But I have to insist that everyone comes to class meeting on time because if people walk in late it disrupts the meeting." Sometimes individual justice must bow to the needs of the group, and I, as adult, am the only one qualified to make that decision. So there is always the reality that our interactions are happening in a power differential between two individuals who are not really equal. There are times when the child must accept my decision even if she doesn't accept my reasons. Just or not, *because I say so* will sometimes have to stand.

I think it is a given that this must be so between teachers and children. In fact, our holding firm meets very real needs the children have for security and consistency in their lives. Open classroom teaching is not an abdication of this responsibility. Again and again I find that when I am sure that a limit should be set and speak with conviction, the children respond with a sense of acceptance, and even relief. There is a part of growing that must take place within a firm and loving adult/child relationship.

There is another part of growing that cannot take place within this relationship--no matter how caring--because it is a relationship of nonequals. The child's gradual decentering from his point of view and beginning to see the validity of another's can only take place when that other is an equal--another child.

> *Egocentrism* (results) *from the inequality between the child and the adult surrounding which presses upon him...In certain circumstances where he experiments in new types of conduct by cooperating with his equals, the child is already an adult. There is an adult in every child and a child in every adult... It is, we may say, simply a question of the proportions in which they are mixed; so long as we remember that every difference of proportion is also a difference of general quality.* (Piaget, 1965, p. 85)

There is a theme in Piaget's work that is of most vital importance. In the Piagetian literature it has been termed "social collaboration." For Piaget, it is only in cooperating with her *peers* that the child begins to move from her egocentric point of view and into an increasingly decentered position from which to comprehend the feelings of others. Peers don't have the power differential described above. Whatever their disagreements, they can never be resolved by one party's stating, "Because I say so," and closing the discussion. It is in this sphere that the endless arguments over whether that last basket counts or whose turn is next or who should be on whose team are so important. In preoperational children, the rules exist already, and they assume they are following them whether they are or not. In the concrete operational stage, children have come to realize that the rules of games are not sacred, but are theirs to decide. Each child will try to get the rules to fit her needs, and so conflicts of interest arise. Out of this process grows a sense of rules which fit the needs of all fairly, and this makes for a better, longer game. At this time, children of unequal skills will even begin to consider the idea of handicaps so that they can play on a more equal basis.

The relationship between this peer interaction and the eventual growth of the moral sense is perhaps a difficult one to see. The crux of the issue is the quality of mutual respect by which children enter into agreements about the rules of the games they play--something which children and adults can only approximate in the school setting. The child

> *...moves from the belief in true rules, ordered from God, etc., to a belief that a true rule is merely the expression of a mutual agreement. From mutual respect comes a concept of justice; thus by examining games behavior, the organization of moral values moves from relative autonomy to the moral conscience of individuals.* (Piaget, quoted in Smith, 1971, p. 4)

THE CONTRIBUTION OF ECOLOGICAL PSYCHOLOGY

It is because peer interaction is so crucial an element in the growth of the child that the open classroom is structured to promote a maximum amount of movement and talking among children. The way the classroom is structured influences the nature of these interactions and the nature and frequency of interventions the teacher must make in these interactions.

The four most important aspects of the structure are: 1) the schedule (the way time is structured--*when* to do things); 2) the activities (things provided by adults to do on a given day apart from the things the permanent environment always offers children--*what* things to do); 3) the rules agreed upon by adults and children (standard limits and expectations--*how* to do things); and 4) the environment (the permanent physical surroundings--*where* to do things).

No matter how firmly the teacher may have her metastructure in mind--whether it's goals and values for humanistic interaction and the maximum activity and collaboration on the part of the children, or the maximum reciprocity between herself and the children, or academic achievement in a silent classroom--she cannot carry these ideas into practice by the sheer strength of her will or personality alone. The structure must support these ideas or she will have to spend a great deal of time and energy working against it. If the organizing aspects of the structure are contradictory or unclear to the children, many of the teacher's interactions with them will be to clarify the rules, the limits, the expectations--not just once but over and over again. If the structure keeps implying that something is permissible, the teacher must use her time and energy to continually remind the children that it is *not*. *Some* repetition is necessary because it is the nature of children to test limits over and over until they feel sure that the limits are not going to change.

In Adventure Yard, there are certain aspects of the structure that are so unclear that the limits *do* change from one occasion to the next, and the more they change, the more the children test. There is a difference in the character of the interactions I have with children when the structure is clear to both of us (or even clear just to me) and the interventions I make when the structure is unclear. The feelings I get from these interventions are usually ambivalence, frustration, and irritation. As I said before, when I am sure of the limits I set, I usually get accepting responses from the children and we all have a positive feeling about the interaction.

Because I don't like feeling uncomfortable and frustrated, I decided to take a look at the structure of the program and see if I could identify some causes for my negative experiences. I have been aware that there are certain times, places, and issues from which I can expect trouble above and beyond the developmentally appropriate trouble I have agreed to put up with in the name of humanism and the growth of creativity in forty children of ages five to nine. I don't mind hassles in the name of moral growth or place value. I rather enjoy them. What I *don't* like are recurring hassles about what ought to be matters of course. Maybe if I can find out why they're happening, I can reduce their occurrence.

A Description of Adventure Yard

Before I continue this discussion of the kinds of interventions I find it necessary to make, I must explain who "we" are and what we intended to happen.

Two Head Teachers:	Doris Smith Tina Carney
Three Teaching Fellows:	Pacific Oaks college students who are in the yard five days a week for both semesters. Each is in charge of some aspect of the program.
Practicum Students:	Approximately ten per semester. Pacific Oaks students with varying degrees of experience in working with children. Here to learn to teach in the open classroom.
Forty Children:	Ten each of kindergartners, first graders, second graders, and third graders. Most come to Adventure Yard from Pacific Oaks' preschool. As mentioned before, by third grade the children have had more experience with adults than most of the college students have had with children.

The Schedule

An average day in Adventure Yard looks like this:

8:15 or 8:30	Staff arrive and set up yard for day's activities.
8:50	Children may come into yard. Activities set up to choose from. All of yard available for use by children. Academics in small groups or individually.
10:30	Juice and crackers set out, help-yourself style. Stay at table, eat, and talk; or return to activity with snack.
11:10	Clean-up. All children expected to help. Set up for two class meetings.
11:30	Kindergartners go home; first, second, third graders go to lunch.
1:00	Children return from lunch. Draw and listen to stories.
1:15	Second and third graders finish academics if they haven't done so in the morning. When finished they are free to mess around. First graders have a choice of three activities involving basic math, reading, or writing skills in main room. After 15 or 20 minutes, they may mess around.
2:00	Going home time.

The Activities

A week's activities, planned for 8:50 to 11:10, look like this:

Monday, November 12
Begin electricity shop--take group of kids to store to buy bulbs, batteries, wire, and price them for sale here
Begin dissecting frogs
Letter signs and badges for Pacific Oaks Ranger clean-up campaign
Write notes home about Bike Day Friday
Modeling clay boats at water table
Orff instruments

Tuesday, November 13
Clean out duck cage
Dissect frogs
Electricity experiments
Take-aparts--old radios
Prepare crackers and peanut butter
Math games--fishing poles with magnets to catch number fish
Large attribute block puzzles in Shady Lane
Later--play dough

Wednesday, November 14
Dissecting
Electricity experiments
Magazine collages--figure/ground perception
Children make task cards for their parents to do at parent meeting (topic: What do kids do here? How do they learn math and reading skills?)
Bean collage--sorting and classifying
Math fishing
Later--fingerpainting

Thursday, November 15
Dissecting
Task cards for parents
Fuzzy letters and numbers to feel while blindfolded
Acrylics--still life on table
Later--potter's wheel

Friday, November 16
Bike Day--Lacey Park

Stories
Acrylics
Books
Journals
Task cards

The daily plans are carefully formulated with specific characteristics in mind. Our curriculum is what is called an "emergent curriculum"--that is, many of the experiences provided for children are suggested to us by the interests they express, the questions they ask, the discoveries they make. The dissecting arose from our attempt to dissect a dead lizard Tim found on a trip to Millard Canyon. He and other children went through a biological supply catalogue and decided what they wanted--ten frogs and one turtle for the turtle enthusiasts among them. They paid for them with profits from their Halloween Store. Often children ask to do tie dying again or paint our hands with wax tomorrow. We then provide these things if possible. Electricity recurs, as do leather work, take-aparts, and boat-making. Bike day is a tradition children remind us of once a semester. Often the most exciting ongoing projects happen when a child's interest coincides with that of a teacher like Michael's wealth of Indian lore, which resulted in making totem poles and the homegrown legends children told about them, or the great whale-watching expedition of 1973.

During the great whale binge, phonics groups centered on whale words, whaling murals and stories were written, children made clay whales and weighed them, estimated the weight and length of a sperm whale's tooth, graphed the number of us it would take to equal the weight of a blue whale's heart, measured the length of an adult and a newborn blue whale in string along the fence from the end of North Yard to the gate to South Yard. We did whale dances to watery music and finally sailed out of Redondo Beach, ninety strong, to watch the grey whales migrate.

The majority of the time, when there is no theme unifying the forty children, a workshop atmosphere prevails, and we plan skill-oriented activities like the math fishing and attribute block games, etc., with the needs of children at various levels in mind. The task cards the children know how to make because they receive them once or twice a semester. New concepts in math are introduced individually or in small groups. Phonics games take place in small groups selected by the teacher.

We try to give the children the sense that the activities they are engaged in are valuable; often they are called "experiments"--small amounts of ingredients are used, changes carefully noted. Other times the fantasy aspect prevails, and it is a mixing/messing activity. This depends a great deal on the developmental level of the children. Younger children tend to need very sensory things to mess around in. We learned this the hard way, because when there were mostly more structured or precise options, some of the kindergartners tended to go to the preschool yards, returning with play dough and fingerpaintings. Often they worked on the more sophisticated activities for awhile, then sought the messing. Thus the provisions we made for "later." They most loved to make "potions" out of any combination of liquids and colors, usually resulting in brown or gray-purple. Once they had washed their hands they couldn't endure touching the remains to clean up. We learned that in a multi-age grouping, though the teacher aims to engage the interest of the most advanced learners and the younger ones will pick up what they are ready for, she also can't take anything away that is appropriate to the youngest children, especially the sensory involvement in just messing.

Always available to children in the morning, afternoon, and free time (the workshop environment) are: paints at the easels; sandbox with shovels, trucks, and plastic animals; water if a warm day; the mole hill and structures for climbing; the basketball court; the cargo net with cushions for jumping; swings; teeter-totter (requested by kids who liked the one in the other yard, shopped for, and built with them); ducks and duck pond (originally a fish pond suggested and built by the children); rabbits, guinea pig, aquariums, and terrariums; the block corner with hot wheels; playhouse and dress-ups; blankets to use anywhere; wood and tools for building; leather and clay (potter's wheel sometimes, and usually on request); books (commercial and made by the children); pencils, paper, crayons, and scissors; compasses, string, tape, rulers, tape measures, stop watch, magnets, and magnifying glass (stereoscope on request); puzzles; and games (commercial and handmade--favorites include "Mille Bornes" and "Trade-a-Tube").

Most objects in the environment are not marked to show they are school property. They mix with children's private belongings and interesting learning happens in the gray areas concerning whose which is whose.

Some of the planned activities go for most of the morning, though not with the same children; the children are free to move freely. Some will stay with one thing all day, several days in a row; some go and return; some try several; some tend to be much more involved with fantasy play than activities. Often activities wind up around 10:00 or 10:30, leaving those supervising adults free to read stories, play games, or work with children in small groups or individually on key words, reading, and math for the younger children, or on math papers, reading, and journals for the second and third graders. Some teachers gather small groups for pantomime, phonics, poetry, music, or walks to look for shapes, letters, or numbers in the neighborhood. Children organize themselves in groups for fantasy play in the sandbox, block corner, structures, or playhouse. Others play basketball. Children freely seek assistance from a teacher when they have a play they want to practice in the Library's front yard.

The Limits

There is always one adult "floating" during the times children have free choices. The floater is usually me. I am responsible for knowing where all forty children and all staff members (usually five or six of them at a time) are as much of the time as possible. When I float, I am available to help solve quarrels that arise between children, and to help children who are at loose ends find something constructive to do--cognitively or socially. Chasing around is usually looked upon as potentially disruptive and kept under close check.

I remind them of the three rules that they have made: 1) no throwing anything but balls (In the dim, distant history of the third graders, one was badly cut by a block thrown during a war when they were in the first grade. They decided on the no-throwing rule then. Most of the younger children see this as a rule imposed by the adults, and not very useful. Ah, tradition!); 2) no wrecking other people's projects; and 3) no disturbing people while they are working (at an activity, in the sandbox, at academics). I also enforce the rules we impose on them regarding the kind of atmosphere we see as most conducive to learning and community--no gang-teasing, no singing obscene songs with another child's name, no gun or war play. I do not censor non-person-directed dirty language. I do forbid the writing of profanities or anything else on permanent equipment, or I insist that the offenders scrub it off.

In the meantime, other staff members are setting limits on disruptive behavior in the various activities, and in their travels about the yard. We all set limits on who can leave the yard. We set these limits with the greatest consistency and reasonableness we can muster.

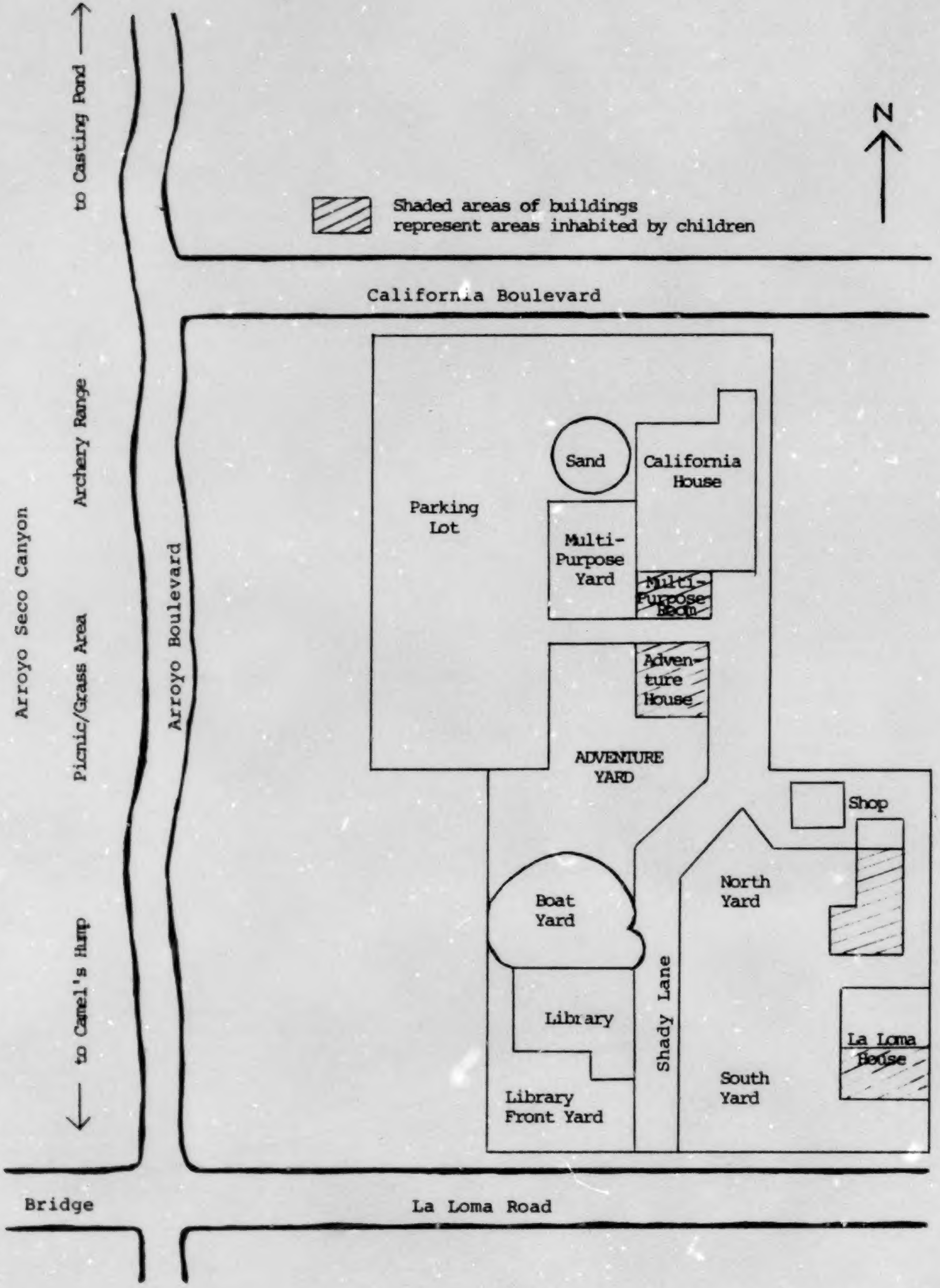
These, then, are the rules. They concern the use of materials, the treatment of the physical environment, the limitations on where children may go, and the treatment of other human beings. Among the limits I have found it difficult to set, restrictions on where the children can go are sometimes the hardest. When I began to take a look at the environment, I found out why. There are many places where the boundaries are very unclear to children--and to me. We've had to forge some agreements about these boundaries, first among ourselves as staff and then with the children. Where we are not clear, we get a lot of testing behavior from the children. This is what we are up against in the environment.

The Environment and Its Limits

Pacific Oaks is a very comfortable, rambly place (see map on the next page). There are two other yards for preschool-age children (three to five years old)--many of them siblings of our children; there are yards, teachers, or practicum students they have had previously. Other yards offer a variety of equipment, activities, and persons not available in our yard. (Children always know when another yard is cooking something. Children always seem to know everything that is happening all over long before adults do, if indeed we *ever* find out about it.) Children can go without a teacher to other yards if they ask one of us first and check with a teacher there. They obey the former when they remember it and consider the latter a formality. If they have gone to another yard without asking, they have to return to our yard and ask before they can leave again. Sometimes they say they *have* asked but can't remember which teacher; often they really haven't. It is almost impossible to substantiate.

Several of the children attended summer school at Pacific Oaks last summer; others will this summer. The format is very different in the summer. Each teacher is responsible for

Children's School Yards



N
Shaded areas of buildings represent areas inhabited by children
to Casting Pond
Archery Range
Arroyo Seco Canyon
Picnic/Grass Area
to Camel's Hump
Arroyo Boulevard
California Boulevard
Parking Lot
Sand
California House
Multi-Purpose Yard
Multi-Purpose Room
Adventure House
ADVENTURE YARD
Shop
North Yard
Boat Yard
Library
Library Front Yard
Shady Lane
La Loma House
South Yard
Bridge
La Loma Road

twenty children who come to her initially when they arrive. She is also responsible for one of the yards (there are four areas and four teachers). Each area is geared to a different type of activity--science, construction, art, and language. It is totally open in the sense that children are free to go from one yard to another, much as our children go from one activity to another during the regular school year. They do not have to ask. At a specified time, all children return to their home groups for a story or meeting.

This past year, it was much harder to enforce the expectation that children ask before going to another yard. I have a feeling that it may have had to do with the fact that some had had the experience of moving freely from yard to yard and preferred it. Others picked up on this. It is also true that we have never had forty children in the yard at one time before. There were twelve more to keep track of than when I was floating the previous year, and they only went up to second grade then.

Shady Lane is another factor. It is a place for riding trikes (which have to be borrowed from other yards--we had one bike, and that got stolen), running relays, jumping rope, hopscotch, and tossing soft balls. Adults use it to get from California House to classes and workshops in La Loma House and to the Library. Children can go into Shady Lane without asking, but have to remember to return and ask to go into other yards. Often, in Shady Lane, they play with children from other yards and tend to wander back with them to their yards.

The gate at the La Loma end of Shady Lane is usually locked. Dempsey Dumpster trash bins are to the right (west) where teachers go with children to dump stuff. This is off limits; the bins contain broken glass, boards with nails, and also fascinating odds and ends--a source of "treasures." The wall between Pacific Oaks and the La Loma sidewalk is off limits. Inside the Library yard along this wall is lots of fun, with bamboo to hide in. The fence between Shady Lane and the Library front yard is fun to climb on, full of nooks and crannies to curl up and hide in.

Shady Lane splits at the back of California House. One part goes up a hill to the parking lot. The boundary between the end of Shady Lane and the parking lot is sufficiently clear. Children take trikes to the top and coast down. The other branch of Shady Lane narrows into a sidewalk between California House and the neighbor's (to the East) high slat fence. There is a gate, usually open. The sidewalk continues to the public sidewalk on California Boulevard. Children are not supposed to go through the gate.

The Library contains children's books; sometimes mothers are there. Children go alone to the Library if they ask. The boat yard between Adventure Yard and the Library contains a treehouse built like a crow's nest with a boat built around the base of the tree, and a pier extending from it. Children can go to the boat yard. Sometimes they are supposed to ask; sometimes it doesn't matter. Along one side of the boat yard is a fence with large holes in it that borders the neighbor's (to the West) property. Children are not supposed to go through the holes. (A friendly cat lives next door.) At the end of the boat yard, between this holey fence and the Library, is a platform and a wooden wall with crawl spaces through to the Library front yard. Children are supposed to stay in the boat yard. Librarians don't especially want a lot of children using the front yard, as staff meetings are held there, people read on the porch, and they want to preserve almost the only grass at Pacific Oaks. Plays and rehearsals *are* okay with them, however.

In the multipurpose room and yard, the second and third graders have the desks they made, as well as their cubbies, journals, math folders, and books. They can come here any time in the morning to do the required reading, math paper, and page in their journals. Usually at 10:00 an adult goes over to help them. Some bring their work into the main yard to do with a teacher there. Others prefer to work outside in the multipurpose yard, on the wall between it and the parking lot, or on a large tile pipe in the sandbox there. There is another pipe that leads to another sandbox on the other side of two brick walls and a sidewalk. The children are not supposed to crawl through this pipe--put there for children to crawl through--because it is difficult to supervise them in the other area, which is close to the parking lot with no fence in between, and close to the front yard, which borders on the sidewalk of California Boulevard--again no fence.

California House contains college classrooms and administrative offices. Several of the children's mothers work there. They can only go to see their mothers if they ask a teacher, and sometimes the teachers say no because parents and teachers have agreed it is important for the children (mostly kindergarten girls) to learn that they can trust the teachers and ask *them* for help.

The workshop has power tools, nails, scrap wood, and carpenters who can help children figure out how to build things. Children have to ask to go there. Behind the workshop

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is a storage shed with assorted--and unassorted--scrounge stuff stacked and heaped around. Children have to ask to go there--another source of treasures.

The roofs of buildings and playhouses, the tops of swing structures, and the slanting fence tops over the animal cages in Adventure Yard are all off limits to Adventure Yard children. The playhouse roof in North Yard is not off limits to children if a staff member is present. The roof of the workshop, which is low and easy to climb onto, may *not* be climbed, and is. The fences in the boat yard have been mentioned as off limits. The fence from the animal cage to the duck pond is covered with ivy and is okay to climb on.

The parking lot is off limits. A slope behind the parking lot where the bike rack is has old climbing bars, packing boxes, and a rundown treehouse; this is off limits, as a neighbor's garage borders on it. Some of the children think a ghost lives there.

The Arroyo Seco, a canyon referred to simply as the Arroyo, is only one door to the West of the Pacific Oaks campus. On days that we take excursions into the Arroyo, children wait by the north wall of the multipurpose yard until all have come with lunch boxes and teachers have gathered balls, books, and games. Each teacher gets a list of five children to be responsible for and informs the children whose group they are in. Groups are informal; children go with other teachers, but the responsible teacher should know where each of her five children are or know who else does know. Children begin to leave when most of this is settled (sometimes they go too soon if there is a delay somewhere). They are supposed to walk down the sidewalk, through the front yard, and along the edge of the parking lot. They stop and look at Pacific Oaks' parking lot entrance, then continue to the corner, where they wait for the teacher(s) to catch up. Sometimes they cross in small groups as children and teacher arrive at the corner. Sometimes the first teacher to arrive has them wait until most of the rest are there to go across together. A teacher and stragglers may cross later. They are supposed to go straight across Arroyo Boulevard and around the tree to the path. Usually they go between the tree and the path. There are no crosswalks marked. Some children wrote the City of Pasadena to say that they should paint some. Children must wear shoes down the path, as there are broken bottles along it.

When they get there, children are supposed to sit down and eat their lunch before playing. Children trade and play "slap jacks, no backs, keeps forever, no erasies" with food they don't want. Some days there are minor outbursts of food-throwing. Baggies and napkins are to be thrown into the trash receptacles. As they finish, the children may begin to play. Some are into football, kickball, baseball. The football got so intensely competitive for two of the children that we discontinued it. We introduced "Capture the Flag," a glorified chasing game that the children love. Several have private forts in the bushes on the hill. They must let the teacher know they are going up, but may not go all the way to the top, which is right by the street. When the poison oak is in bloom, children must stay out of the hills.

Some days the sprinklers are on over most of the grass when we are there. If it is warm, children may get wet. The park people have told them they can't squirt each other with the sprinklers because it doesn't water the grass evenly. It is very hard for some of the children to go by this. The bathrooms have walls that jut out from the doorways to screen the entrances. Children love to climb on these and watch whatever is going on. Others like to climb on these and bug the children watching. Others like to climb on everything, and go up to the roof. When we realized that it was possible for children to be injured if the heavy door to the bathroom was closed while they had fingers in the crack while climbing, and when the amount of teasing increased as well, we decided--about midway through the first semester--that they could no longer climb on the walls. A couple of staff members didn't see this area as so great a danger and were reluctant to limit kids from it, but agreed to do so for the sake of consistency.

There is an archery range at the north end of the lawn. The children have done some archery and have proper respect for the danger of arrows. They like to look for arrows behind the targets, but do so only when nobody is shooting at all. When only the west-end targets are being used, children like to hide behind the east-end targets. Once a man came and told them not to play in the bales of straw because the archers had to work hard to maintain them.

Within hiking distance from the lawn is a spring up on the hill; some children have forts there. They must take a teacher to go in the hills past a certain unmarked but understood point. Further along the Arroyo, under the bridge, is a good hill for climbing and a drain pipe good for all kinds of experimentation--potentially dangerous for kids below to get hit by rocks rolled down the pipe from above. Even further along is the "Camel's Hump," a legendary climbing opportunity. As years progress, it gets smoother and harder to get up the "hump." Children love to try. The staff hates it; someone's always getting stuck, while those who don't have any trouble go ripping out of sight around the top.

An expectation is that children stay within sight of the teacher, on the way up, at the top, and on the way back. Because of the wide age range and the accompanying wide range of physical abilities, it is typical for a teacher to have both the slowest and fastest children on the same expedition.

A short hike along the Arroyo--in the other direction from the picnic lawn--is a practice casting pond, a cement pond with sloping sides and water two feet deep. Children have tested the boats they have built here. They are not allowed to wade in it. Casters have shouted at them for going in. It's "illegal" by virtue of a Pasadena city ordinance.

An additional trek brings us to the only part of the Arroyo where the stream isn't put through a cement channel--Buffalo Wallow. This part of the stream has a wonderful muddy bottom full of plant and animal life. Children must wear tennis shoes and nave a change of clothes to go there. Expeditions are organized by children in advance. They always want to go, but many staff members have told the children that they won't accompany them because when some children get there, they are unable to behave safely. If told they may go but not get wet, some children will prefer not to go at all.

To return from an excursion to the Arroyo, the children gather at the bench at the foot of the hill, getting shoes and shirts back on and collecting lunch boxes. Some are off on hikes; some don't like to leave, and they stall. There is an undefined expectation to sort of wait until most are ready to go up. Some children go ahead and a teacher will follow to cover. The first children up sit on the curb and wait for the main body. Some stragglers, and a teacher to cover, follow up, depending on who is straggling and why, and whether they can engage the adult in a game of stalling. Children are expected to go up the public, official path, not up the unofficial straight-up-the-hill trail. If they go up this trail, they are supposed to go back down and come up the path. Park maintenance men have told the children not to go up the trail because it knocks rocks down that get in the lawnmower. According to Tim, if we're so worried about eroding the hill, it doesn't make very good sense for him to go back down, does it?

The limits we as a staff have attempted to impose on children's physical location are based on two considerations. First, we value keeping the children's activities based in Adventure Yard in order to promote a feeling of group membership and community. We feel we have provided activities because they are important for the children's growth and also because we need to be able to observe their activities in order to learn more about them in order to teach them more effectively. It is for this reason that we have tried to supervise and sometimes restrict the flow of our children to other yards. We have worked very hard to provide the messing that the kindergartners need because though they could meet those needs with another group, there are other needs which we feel are equally important and cannot be met if they spend a great deal of time where we can't interact with them.

Second are legal and safety factors. Often when nine-year-olds have offered to cross the street to the Arroyo alone, we've had to say, "I know you can do that at home, but this is school and it is our responsibility to know where you are at all times." Children tend to believe that accidents don't happen to them, and so don't think much of some safety arguments, particularly those requiring them to stay in sight on hikes. The presence of occasional exhibitionists or other persons with sexual problems is also a comprehensible, if remote, danger. They mostly know that they do not like to have an adult watching and restricting them all the time. I don't blame them. As discussed previously, they are beginning to shake loose of old dependencies on adults and try their own wings in the world. Much of the conflict regarding the Arroyo arose from this discrepancy between adult concerns and children's needs. Staff found that a few clear limits which could be consistently enforced, the greatest possible privacy and responsibility entrusted to the children, and a carefully alert distance kept between oneself and the group for which one was responsible worked the best.

Summary of Adult Interventions

Given the structure of Adventure Yard, there are some general categories of interventions which teachers make in children's activities:

1. Arbitrating in child/child uproars--facilitating problem-solving between children; adult should be neutral.

2. Imposing schedule limits--closing activity time, beginning clean-up, beginning class meeting, coming back from lunch, beginning work time, etc.; adult is in authority.

3. Imposing environmental limits--where it's okay to go, whom you have to ask to go where, physical safety rules for hiking, being where an adult knows she can find you, staying off bathroom walls (what's safe to some adults seems dangerous to others--hazy area), carving, hot wax, fires in the yard; adult is in authority.

4. Imposing expectations for behavior in group activities--how much dough you can eat making cookies, how many materials you can use on your project so there is enough for everybody, whether you can sing "fuck, shit, fuck shit" with the song; mutual agreement between adult and children whenever possible.

5. Imposing expectations for behavior outside of Pacific Oaks--in car (safety also), on field trips (language and gestures appropriate to public expectations), quiet at the library; adult is in authority.

6. Imposing expectations for cooperation in whole-group times (traditional regularities)--clean-up, class meeting, information meetings early in the morning; I am very fuzzy here. At times only adult-as-authority works; at times that fails and only enlisting the children's cooperation as being mutually responsible works.

7. Imposing expectations for purposeful behavior in general at this school (task of the floater)--when children can run and chase, when they need to channel their energy into a purposeful activity, when a child has hung on the periphery too long and needs encouragement to become involved in something new and perhaps threatening; adult as authority in limiting chasing; or mutually endeavoring to find something interesting to do together, with other children or with another teacher.

8. Imposing expectations for overall level of energy in the yard (with forty children and the time of day in mind)--adult as organizer; floater as authority figure to other adults--we need somebody to read a story, somebody to get those kids fingerpainting or into something messy (most often at 10:00 to 10:30 time period).

9. Imposing academic expectations--with some children the teacher reminds; with others she insists.

10. Intervening to provide stimulus to explore further--a question, materials, etc.

An Attempt at a More Precise Analysis

Often when discipline problems arise in a classroom, teachers look for causes in the individual children:

> *He has a difficult home life.*
>
> *She is hyperactive.*
>
> *She likes any kind of attention, even negative attention, so when she wants me to notice her, she is disruptive.*

Even the developmental approach has this personal orientation:

> *She is just beginning to see that adults are not always right, and so she is testing our authority more.*
>
> *He doesn't observe the rules about asking the teacher to leave because he is in the stage of development in which children aren't aware that their actions aren't just a special case of an already existing rule.*

These insights into a specific child's behavior are important, and they are one means by which the question of authority in the classroom can be kept from degenerating into a contest of wills between the teacher and the child. It is one way to look at a child who is driving you up the walls and see that her behavior has inner reasons of its own, and is not expressly or maliciously designed to keep you from doing your job of educating her and thirty-nine others, however much it may seem so. (At times her behavior may, however, draw its energy from the relationship between you, and that is a different set of problems, which will be discussed in the section on "Games People Play at School." These games are highly personal, between a particular child and a particular adult, and must be examined in this light. There is an immediate solution that can be found, called "game anthesis," and once the game is interrupted, the relationship can return to a more normal level of interaction.) Developmentally-grounded problems must be understood and will not resolve themselves until the child has matured sufficiently to move beyond them--egocentric uproars (such as problems of intentionality), the irritability involved in transitions, and the delight in proving adults inept are examples. Of course, these can be "programmed out" of children's behavior--punished so severely that they dare not surface, rewarded into acceptable facades of agreeability for the sake of the more important task at hand--that is, academic achievement (if that is regarded to be a task important enough to demand such total negation of children's other needs).

It is the purpose of the open classroom to meet both academic and other needs--social, emotional, ethical. In order to do both, there must be some balance established between the two. Admittedly, one could spend all day arbitrating hassles between children, defending the justice of one's injunctions or reminding children of limits. In the normal course of events in the most smoothly organized classroom, there are infinite opportunities to explore the rules between children and their peers and between children and teachers.

In less precisely organized classrooms, the number of hassles arising from confusion about limits demands huge amounts of the teacher's energy in order to simply maintain some semblance of order; there is an order possible in freely flowing, noisy open classrooms, though it looks much different from the still, immobile order of a well-disciplined, traditional classroom. If she is constantly having to shore up a shaky structure, the teacher has much less choice about the balance she will establish between academic and emotional interventions.

I got the feeling that I was spending too much of my time engaged in hassles that were not games between myself and children, nor were they primarily developmentally-triggered, although once a hassle was begun, the interaction took the classic developmental game form. They were triggered, not by *intra*-personal needs of the children nor by *inter*-personal relationships between the children and myself. They were *trans*-personal hassles, triggered by inadequacies of the structure, and therefore could be reduced as the structure was clarified.

The search for a theory that would permit me to look at what happens in Adventure Yard as something other than a personal or an interpersonal issue led me to Roger Barker's book, *Ecological Psychology* (1968). He states:

> *We could predict some aspects of children's behavior more adequately from knowledge of the behavior characteristics of the drugstores, arithmetic classes, and basketball games they inhabited than from knowledge of the behavior tendencies of particular children.*
>
> *...we look at the environment of behavior as a phenomenon worthy of investigation for itself, and not as an instrument for unraveling the behavior-relevant programming within persons.* (Barker, 1968, p. 4)
>
> *Individual persons within a bounded unit differ in psychological attributes; their behavior in the same environment will therefore differ.*
>
> *However...inhabitants of identical ecological units will exhibit a characteristic overall* *extra-individual pattern of behavior* *and the inhabitants of different ecological units will exhibit different overall extra-individual patterns of behavior.* (Barker, 1968, p. 10)

It is difficult to perceive these extra-individual patterns of behavior because we are trained to see "persons whenever we see behavior" (Barker, 1968, p. 16). But it seems to me to be very important, in a discussion of the changing style of authority in the open classroom, to consider the possibility that not all behavior which teachers and children exhibit is caused by *personal* issues. One of the most difficult emotions to deal with in any interaction with people is the painful experience of "taking everything personally." Some of the hassles that occur in the classroom are not because of me as a person, or even because of the children as persons.

Behavior Settings: An Analysis of the Schedule

The "ecological units" Barker refers to are what he terms "BEHAVIOR SETTINGS"--stable, extra-individual units with great coercive power over the behavior that occurs within them. I find this concept very helpful in examining the environment of Adventure Yard. Briefly, the characteristics of behavior settings follow.

They consist of one or more standing patterns of behavior which occur at specific times and places. They have unique characteristics which persist even when the participants change. The patterns of behavior take place in a *milieu*, which includes both the man-made and natural features of the physical environment, and there is a relationship between the behavior that takes place and the physical setting in which it occurs. Each behavior setting is to a greater or lesser degree interdependent on the other behavior settings around it.

Examples of behavior settings are: a) a group of children sitting at a table with a teacher, painting with acrylics and talking to each other; b) a class meeting; and c) thirty children and four teachers sitting on or standing by the wall outside the side entrance of California House, waiting for the teacher in charge of the lunch program to give the teachers the lists of children they will be responsible for at lunch in the Arroyo.

Setting (a) is an example of a behavior setting which is one of several settings available to the children during the morning activity time. The morning activity time itself is an aggregation of various behavior settings with free flow between them, but a restricted flow beyond its boundaries. The children at the acrylic table are there either because they have chosen to paint, they like the people who are there painting, or both. They will stay as long as they like and then they will leave to select another activity, or to create one, or to be approached to do academics. If they stay until 11:10, they will be told it's time to clean up and get ready for class meeting. Generally, children who are at this table are painting. If they are not painting, they must not disturb those who are. If their behavior disrupts the others, then they will be asked to leave--or in some instances, they will turn the painting table into a different behavior setting--a free-for-all, a chasing game, or an involved conversation about an idea for a play, whereupon the children will leave to begin rehearsals. Most behavior settings in Adventure Yard at this time are not so all-powerful that an individual can have no effect on them.

Setting (b) is an example of a behavior setting which is the only one available to the children at this time of day. Like it or not, they must be there, and they must sit in the circle and listen. When children's behavior deviates from this expectation, teachers and children try various techniques to quiet or restrain the disrupters. If they refuse to conform, they must leave the meeting. Sometimes that's precisely what they wanted to have happen.

Setting (c) is an example of a transition. It is a behavior setting because it is a standing pattern of behavior. Every day children and staff gather here to go to lunch. Unfortunately, the relationship between the behavior--waiting--and the milieu--the fence and sandboxes of the multipurpose yard--is poor. Actually, there are very few places that are good for waiting when one is a child. It's much easier to wait for something to begin--children waiting for the story to begin can draw and are quite contented--than it is to wait to go somewhere--children waiting to go to class meeting, lunch, up from lunch, and home tend to have much more trouble finding things to do that don't go beyond the bounds of acceptable behavior.

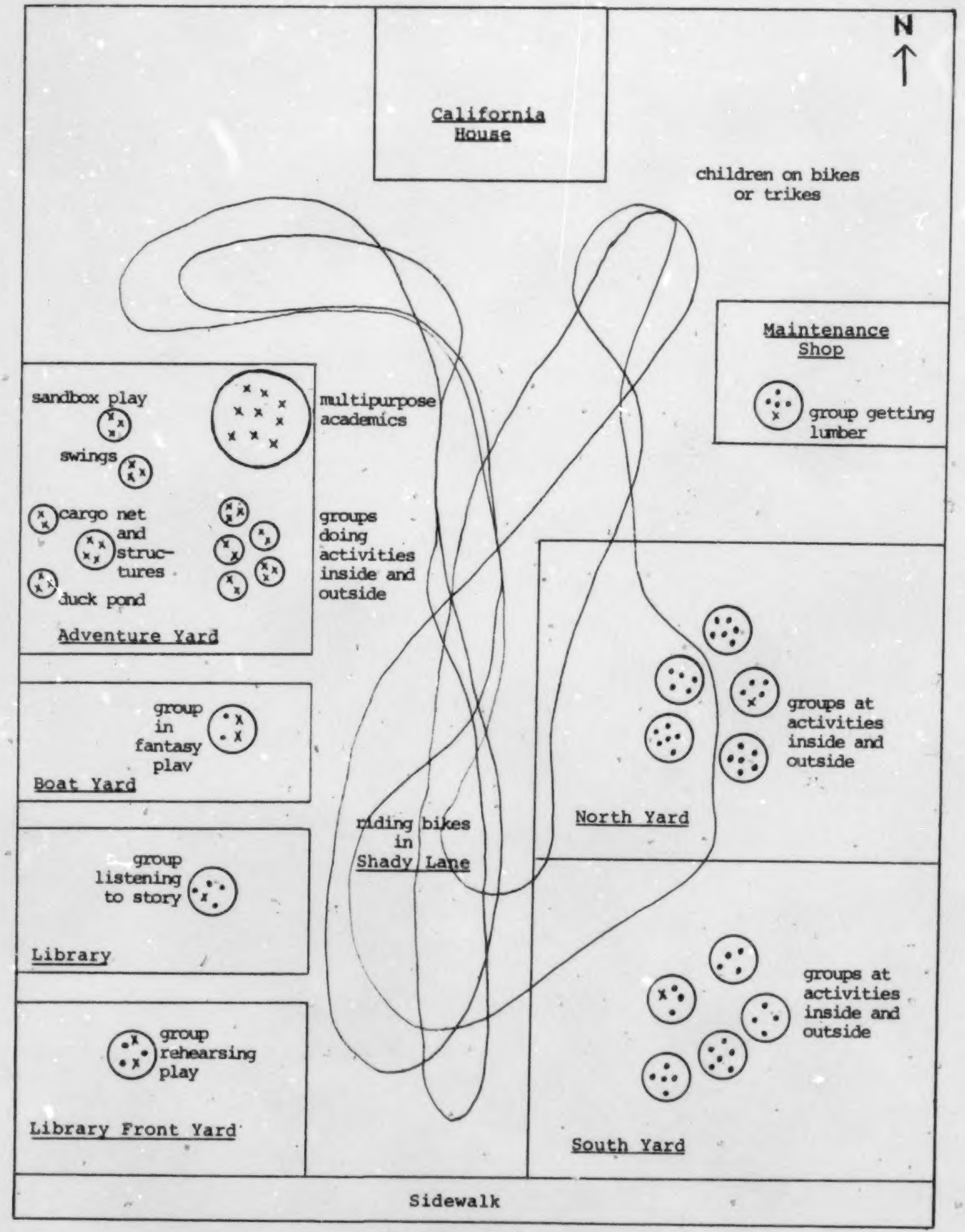
Because I noticed that the need for adult intervention varied throughout the day, I analyzed the schedule in terms of major behavior settings and the transitions between them. The times when the structure necessitated more interventions are marked with an (*). Settings and transitions that I will discuss later are numbered; the paragraphs which discuss these have corresponding numbers and begin on page 93.

(1) SETTING I 8:50-10:00, 10:30, or 11:00.
Open activity time. Activities set up, much novelty, standard equipment always available. Intense involvement. Most children gather at center of activity, tables in main room, or just outside in main yard. Small muscle activity predominates. Staff involved in activities.

TRANSITION I 8:50-9:20.
Home to school. All children. Arrive over a thirty-minute span.

TRANSITION II 10:00-10:30.
Generally juice time. Some children. Gradual shift in atmosphere.

An attempt to picture the behavior settings from which Adventure Yard children feel free to choose, in the time from 8:50 to 11:10, as described in the analysis, looks something like this (Adventure Yard children are the X's and lines).


N
California House
children on bikes or trikes
Maintenance Shop
group getting lumber
sandbox play
swings
cargo net and structures
duck pond
multipurpose academics
groups doing activities inside and outside
Adventure Yard
group in fantasy play
Boat Yard
group listening to story
Library
group rehearsing play
Library Front Yard
riding bikes in Shady Lane
groups at activities inside and outside
North Yard
groups at activities inside and outside
South Yard
Sidewalk
La Loma Road

* AMBIGUOUS TIME 10:00-10:30 or 11:00. Some activities wind down or fold. Others continue. Second and third graders go to multipurpose room to do academics. Staff go there or approach first graders to do academics individually or in small groups.

Some children disperse throughout our yard, go to other yards, or Shady Lane. Large muscle play predominates. Sandbox, duck pond, basketball court. The time when younger children get paints, etc. from shelves and make potions. Try to head them off by planning a more directed messy activity.

This is perhaps the hardest time for the supervising teacher. Many children and most staff are quite involved. Other children really begin exploring the limits of the environment; their spontaneous explorations continually lead them beyond the boundaries adults approve of, in where they go and how they use materials, and how they treat each other.

(2) * TRANSITION III 11:10-11:20. All children and staff. Five to ten-minute range between time some stop and others begrudgingly quit their activities or return to the yard. Clean-up in process. Those who finish early or avoid it entirely wait for those who are working hard or those who are resisting.

Children get ticket or count off to determine which class meeting to go to (a procedure we never satisfactorily organized).

Go to class meeting. Sit and wait for others to arrive and begin.

(3) * SETTING II 11:20-11:30. Class meeting. All children, all staff, no options. Sit in circle, listen to others, share when turn comes.

TRANSITION IV 11:30-11:40. Go to lunch. Children in one class meeting may have to wait for other class meeting to finish before getting lunches. Wait until all children, five staff members, and equipment are ready. May wait up to seven minutes Go to wherever lunch program is being held--usually the Arroyo.

SETTING III 11:40-12:45. Lunch program.

A. Lunch per se.

B. Play time. If in the Arroyo, sports, hikes; children have forts in the hills.

TRANSITION V 11:45-12:45. Gradual. As children finish eating, they wander off to play.

(4) * TRANSITION VI 12:45.
All children and staff. Stop activity, gather lunch boxes, jackets, shirts, sweaters, put on shoes. Five to ten-minute lag between first ones ready and stragglers. Group may wait at bottom of hill or go up and wait at curb.

Return to room. Get drink, go to bathroom (bathrooms are available to children at all times, both in the yard and in the Arroyo), put stuff away. Find place to sit for story. Wait for rest of kids to arrive. Draw and talk while waiting. Five-minute lag.

SETTING IV 1:00 or 1:10.
Stories. Draw and listen or don't listen quietly. Some play marbles. All must be inside at the site of a story.

TRANSITION VII 1:15 or 1:20.
All children. Stories end; some go from one room to the other where their work is.

(5) * SETTING V 1:15-1:40.
Work time.

A. Multipurpose room--second and third graders.

(6) * B. Main room--first graders.

TRANSITION VIII
Gradual. Upon completing expectations for work, children mess around inside or outside.

(7) * SETTING VI 1:15-2:00.
Free time. Some children; others need all the time from 1:15 to 2:00 to complete work if they didn't do any in the morning. No activities are set up. Permanent environment available for use, though adults tend to put restrictions on painting or clay (activities that involve a lot of clean-up).

TRANSITION IX 2:00.
All children. Stop activities, get stuff, and wait by fence for carpools. Staff clean and lock up; may plan for the next day.

Interdependence Criterion: An Analysis of the Morning Activity Time

One of the concepts that Barker uses has proved most useful. It is the "INTERDEPENDENCE CRITERION" (Barker, 1968, p. 22). One characteristic of behavior settings is that "each setting is to a greater or lesser degree interdependent on the other behavior settings around it." A behavior setting is in some ways quite clearly separate from other units, but no setting exists in a vacuum. There are other settings near it or surrounding it.

An example of a behavior setting (or so I thought) is the acrylic table outside in the main yard of Adventure Yard. Terry and Ginny are painting, along with a teacher and three other children. In the yard are other behavior settings existing simultaneously. Also outside, there is a table with children dissecting frogs, children throwing pots on the potter's wheel and working with clay, children building a fort in the sandbox, children swinging on the swings, children holding the ducks in the water table and recording their quacks. Inside, in the multipurpose room, children are doing academics. In the main room, children are writing task cards for their parents to do. A teacher has just finished with a group of children in a phonics lesson in the back room and they run out into the yard. One of them, Nick, bursts out full of energy, swaggers by the acrylic table and takes a swipe at Ginny's picture. That is their signal for a chase. Eyes shining, they take off, through the yard, and out into Shady Lane. Terry, who was painting with Ginny, follows. In Shady Lane, Terry's sister from Bunny's yard is riding the rickshaw, a trike with a double back seat. She has been talking to two friends from her own yard who are leaning over the fence. Terry gets in the back seat of the rickshaw and is given a ride to Molly's yard, where they are making tacos. The two children drive the rickshaw back to Shady Lane to show Nick and Ginny the tacos. All race off to Molly's to see if there are enough for them to have some. There are. Tacos in hand, they go through Bunny's yard, where there is a favorite story being read aloud. Before the story is finished, a rather irritated teacher from Adventure Yard arrives to say that it's time for class meeting, we have been looking all over for them, they didn't tell a teacher they were going to another yard,...(and since Ginny and Terry have been known to run to California House without asking to see Ginny's mom, or to wander out the open gate and up the sidewalk of California Boulevard, staff are justifiably concerned about where they might be).

Multisettings

This began as a discussion of the interdependence criterion among behavior settings, and it still is. What I have just proved to myself is that not only is the acrylic table in Adventure Yard not a distinct behavior setting, but that Adventure Yard itself is not one either at this particular time of the day and within the given structure of the morning activity time. The whole of the Pacific Oaks Children's School is what Barker terms a "MULTISETTING SYNOMORPH" (Barker, 1968, p. 24). This simply means that the several settings do not function independently. Teachers tend to regard the behavior setting with which they and their children are involved as the yard to which they are assigned, although Bunny and Molly have taken down the fence between their yards, and their two yards combined form one larger setting. Their children are three to five years of age and are sometimes intimidated by forty bigger kids, so they use their teachers as a shield when they come. Our children need no such protection, and feel free to go where they will. They tend to regard the behavior setting available to them as the whole of the Children's School, and the children with mothers working on campus tend to regard their mothers' offices and their mothers as their territory to be freely visited, no matter how hard staff and mothers try to convince them otherwise.

Once again, there are two distinct realities at work. For the teachers in Adventure Yard, the reality is mostly "our yard." For the children, the reality is the whole place. This is obvious every time a child comes and says, "There's a movie in the dining room (California House). Can I go watch?" and the teacher looks blank because she had no idea there was a movie. "What movie?" she asks, and the children proceed to tell her in great detail. They always know who's cooking, who's on a field trip, who's caught a snake. Their communication system is like the underground threads of a mushroom. They inhabit the whole turf; the mushroom is just the part an observer can see. In this case at this time, the "whole turf" is Pacific Oaks Children's School, not Adventure Yard. My professional reasons for wanting to keep them based in Adventure Yard (which I mentioned earlier in my discussion of limits) notwithstanding, the interdependence of the settings--*as far as the children are concerned*--has reduced my attempts to the same sort of exercise undertaken by the nameless Dutch boy who found the hole in the dike.

Running a Multisetting--The Floater

Actually, there are ways to keep the children in the yard other than ordering them in and locking the gates. In any multiple-setting unit, some person or persons organize the various settings into a smoothly fitting whole. In Barker's example of a small community, the planning chairman of the Methodist fundraising committee would not schedule a bake sale on the same Saturday as the annual 4-H bake sale. The city elders try to keep the youngsters off the streets by sponsoring a recreation center.

In Adventure Yard, we try with the daily plan to include enough elements to keep the children in our yard for a part of the day, and make special attempts to meet the needs of the younger children by introducing the kind of messy activity they were going elsewhere to find. Because no one can really predict whether or not anyone will feel like painting or dissecting, or that the usual intricate fantasy play in the sandbox will take off, the most important job of the floater is to examine continually the existing settings and determine whether or not they offer adequate opportunities for involvement--that is, if there are enough acceptable patterns of behavior for children to plug into.

If there are not, children establish their own patterns of behavior. By no means are all of their own behavior settings inappropriate. Usually they are such that no adult intervention is necessary. If their activities border on being too "high" or contain destructive elements--misuses of other children, materials, or animals--the floater steps in and redirects the behavior. Usually it is possible to make a suggestion or set a limit on some particular aspect so that the original plan can continue without including the objectionable part of the idea. If children cannot drop their teasing or misuse of materials, or if this is the primary thrust of the setting, they are redirected into a completely different setting, and are often separated. For example, three children have begun teasing a fourth child. If they can't accept any suggestions for incorporating her into their play in a positive way, they are told they must find a different game to play. Usually the children as a unit have a behavior "set"--the reason for their maintaining themselves as a group is to exclude the other child, and as long as they are together, they will continue to do so, even if they have to actively seek the other child out. In this case, the only way to break the behavior "set" is to break up the group.

Sometimes when I have floated, I've gotten locked into a personal overview of the situation, seeing only individual children in disorganized movements, a lot of chasing, a lot of quarreling. I was patching up one outbreak of inappropriate behavior after another, feeling like I needed to be three places at once, wondering why me, all of a sudden. Or I'd look around and all the tables would be empty of people, the yard deserted. I'd make a quick run-through of the other yards and find many of our children there. The number of behavior settings may decline with a bang or a whimper.

It is the responsibility of the floater to foresee these changes, and to make sure there are enough acceptable behavior settings going at all times. She has to have a wide repertoire of suggestions to pull off the top of her head. Sometimes she can suggest something to a group of children--like running relays in Shady Lane--and help them find the stop watch. They know how to use it, and need no adult assistance or supervision. Or she may impound a staff member and say, "Read a story to that group" or "Play basketball with that group" or "See those kids? Figure out something, quick!" The trick is to deploy forces without getting involved in a setting yourself, because the only way to see the whole picture is to stay free.

The only way to function in this job is to see what's happening in terms of structure. Not: "There goes Nick again; he's sure a hyper child," but: "Uh oh! Nick's been in his block fort for twenty minutes and any minute now he's going to tear out of there convinced he's a robber and I'll never get him down, so I'd better redirect him now." This is an example of structure applied to the needs of an individual child. Or about a group of children: "Uh oh! Where are Ginny, Terry, and Michele? This is the time of day when the things they like to do in the yard no longer interest them and they find such obnoxious things to do when they're bored. Maybe I can get them involved in a potion (but then I know it will have to be supervised or they will pour in everything). Maybe I'll set up the teeter-totter instead and see if I can't convince them that they've been wanting to play on it. Or get Hank to read them that story they like so much."

An assessment of the total picture might sound like: "In five minutes or so they will be through painting, and probably Stacey and Ned will be the only ones left with the dissecting. The sandbox group just got wound up so they'll be all right, and the older kids have gone to do academics. Many of the teachers are reading with the kindergartners and first graders, but that's one-to-one. We don't have enough time to start popcorn." Back into the memory files for who likes to do what, who can be counted on to always like to fingerpaint, who might take some children on a walk looking for letter shapes in the tree trunks. Sometimes I just steel myself for a bitchy ten minutes because there isn't time to start anything, or I surprise myself and come up with a stroke of genius in the teeth of disaster--like beginning a snake dance that ends with everyone laughing in a heap on the basketball court where we have a class meeting all together and then clean up before going to lunch. (I've never tried this; I just thought of it, but it *might* work. Surprises are nice sometimes. Sometimes we even surprise ourselves.)

Setting Limits in the Various Behavior Settings

(1) Morning activity time. In spite of the way Adventure Yard is inextricably bound to the other yards at this time of the morning, I like the way it is internally structured,

with the free flow of activities. Usually children work in our yard for most of the morning before they become interested in what may be happening in the far corners of their kingdom, so I have about an hour when the only interventions I have to make are those where children playing on their own are really unable to solve differences among themselves. At the teacher-directed activities, children and adults must negotiate what behavior is acceptable to the task at hand or they may even decide to change the task; near the end of a productive session of measuring dry flour, cornmeal, rice, etc., on the balance scale, some of the younger children wanted to add water and mess around, and they were allowed to make patterns of the gloop on the table where they had finished measuring. They were not allowed to do so until all the children who wanted to try it had used the dry materials.

There are limits inherent in any activity a child participates in or initiates in the yard, whether or not the group includes an adult. Children themselves have very definite ideas of propriety for any given endeavor. Some of the planned activities are tightly structured; others are not. Popping popcorn, using the power saw, and carving have safety limits that must be observed. Some music activities can tolerate yelling and random banging; in other activities this may be disruptive. Always there is the issue of what is appropriate here, now, with these people. When limits are not clear, children do whatever it takes to find out. Then if they don't like the limits, they go elsewhere. If a child can't or won't conform to the standards the group has settled on, she is asked to leave. Somewhere there is something rowdy enough for a child in a noisy mood, gloopy enough for a child asked to leave a cooking activity because she is using the dough as a potion. An adult may be called in if a child refuses to conform to the standards of a group of children working autonomously. Sometimes the standards are so rigid the adult negotiates for a more open attitude; if it's a peer group exclusion, the adult attempts to include the child or helps her understand the others' feelings and find another activity.

In peer interactions--especially with the younger, more egocentric children, who make up rules in their heads as they go along--at any moment one's unsuspecting neighbor may have just committed the gravest breach of conduct. Drawn to the site of such an altercation by the loud accusations and protests of innocence, I find diversion the only tactic that works. There is no justice or truth to which one can appeal; there is only the passion of two opposing realities.

Ownership is another Gordian Knot of contention; the centuries of wars fought over which territory should now belong to which group of people who once lived there are proof that property rights and territoriality are age-old problems of humanity. In a free-flowing classroom, it is one of the most frequent issues over which an adult must preside, in what seems like the trial in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*:

> Child 1: *That stick is mine. It was lying on the ground and I found it.*
> Child 2: *No, it's mine. I put it there to go and get juice and crackers.*
> Child 3: *No, it's mine. I had it yesterday.* (And had forgotten it until now.)

The only sure claim is, "I brought it from home." Something from home is seen by most children as *truly* private property, but try to prove you did. All the rest of the stuff in the yard is up for grabs--all too literally.

One minute after the above dispute is settled, whether by agreement among the children or by an arbitrary and exasperated action of the adult, the stick is again left lying on the ground by the triumphant winner. As with the rules of the game discussed in the section on Piaget, it isn't the object or the game that really matters. It is the *argument* that is important, "the fair play of adulthood won on the battlefields of childhood" or some such paraphrase. These altercations are fun for me, actually; they are so intense. I keep things from coming to blows if possible, but my role is mainly to try and get the children to listen to each other and come to their own resolution. As Piaget pointed out, it is this confrontation between equals that is the heart of the decentering process.

There are times when these discussions can run their course, times when a different goal must have priority. I stepped into an argument over an often-traded ball-point pen on the steps of the Museum of Science and Industry, pointed out that if they kept arguing now, they'd miss seeing the exhibits, and I would keep it for them until they had time to resolve the issue. I still have the pen; it is in terrible shape--probably always was--and neither ever remembered to ask me for it.

(2) Wind-up/clean-up. One of the problems peculiar to the open classroom is that when a child is very involved in doing something of her own free will, she is often very

reluctant to stop. (In an open classroom workshop for teachers, which Doris and I gave in our yard, one of the most astonishing feelings expressed by the adults was how reluctant they were to stop working with materials. We had set the yard up as we do for the children, and the activity time for the adults was just like the one described during a regular school day. Some of the adults were extremely resistant to stop for a group meeting; a couple were hostile. When they finally did all get in a group, they said they truly understood how the children must dislike being interrupted.) Obviously adult intervention is necessary to stop the activity time and move into class meeting. Clean-up is always adult-imposed. Some children keep working, surreptitiously or openly; others begin to clean up and get involved playing with what they are supposedly cleaning up. This is especially true in the block corner and sandbox. Others use the time to play chase with teachers who want them to help. Many help willingly. There's a lot of mess in a program like this. The really messy things children love to create they want nothing to do with cleaning up. It's hard to believe that this child, so fastidiously picking up the pot with the tips of her fingers, was five minutes ago up to her elbows in the potion it contained.

(3) Class meeting. Class meeting is not without its traumas, although it is certainly a well-defined behavior setting with clear boundaries and expectations: come in, sit in a circle, listen quietly, and take turns. There are those who cannot sit still, some who can't be quiet, others who can but *won't* for various personal reasons, and some who could if everyone else would, but since *they* won't, these can't. And many who can and do and wish everyone else would. Older children often think the kindergartners' contributions are "dumb," and kindergartners get restless at the involved debates about who is to use which half of the sandbox when or how long the block fort may be left up at one time--those old concrete-operational rule negotiations that can't really be dealt with at class meeting without losing the attention of everyone not involved. Teachers have tried sending recalcitrants out of the room, making class meeting more interesting by doing stories, games, and chants, or having a "silly speech" time, discussing the problems and enlisting the children's most adult cooperation, asking them for suggestions. All techniques are variously successful and/or unsuccessful, depending on the mood of the day. It is the kind of behavior setting that children do not naturally select. It is not to be expected that they grow into it overnight. The times when it's calm and real problems are discussed feel very good to children and adults alike. Other times it seems more important to the children to outsmart adults by sabotaging the whole affair, which they regard as adult-imposed. Individuals who have games to run have a captive audience, and if they can get removed by a teacher, they then get to play one-to-one.

(4) Coming up from lunch. As stated in example (c) of a behavior setting, waiting is not an easy thing for children to do, especially in coming up from the Arroyo. Often the physical boundaries of the waiting are unclear both to children and to adults. In attempting to establish firm limits about where to wait in order to keep better track of everybody, teachers tend to "store" children very close together with nothing much to do except mess around with each other until everybody is rounded up. Then teachers get irritated because they have to intervene so frequently in fights and arguments, especially on hot, smoggy days. Alternatives to that are to "store" children over a wider space, where there is more to do while waiting, at the risk of losing track of a couple or having to pry away children who have just gotten involved in digging a road through the dirt. Or to let the children who are ready go with some staff members and have other staff wait with the stragglers. The first children tend to go fast and get ahead of the teachers, who hurry up, leaving a group in the middle to get involved in chasing lizards, and the stragglers, alone with a teacher, sometimes get into horrendous stalling games. Aside from using whistles and military techniques of rounding up everyone at 12:45 "on the nose, no exceptions, drop what you are doing, march to the benches, and stand at parade rest until your commander gives the order to storm up the hill," I as yet see no way to avoid or really even shorten some of these waiting times. I am now, however, much more on the alert at these times, and I can maintain a better temper when I attribute rotten behavior to the setting and not to the ill nature of the children and myself.

(5) Academics. I need to discuss transitions to academics in general. Although learning is happening all the time in Adventure Yard--and we feel that the most important learning comes through the activities and spontaneous ideas of the children--we also feel that the children are at that stage where the skills they are learning--reading, writing, computation--need consistent practice. So there are academic expectations for all the children, and these are adult-imposed expectations.

If these expectations seem very low in terms of time spent, we believe that if the children spend a shorter amount of time, but a more involved, more focused time, on **their** academics than do their counterparts in regular classes, they will have equally successful

growth in these areas, in addition to all the experiences in physics, chemistry, biology, and law that the enriched environment offers in between. The time a child *actually* spends reading during a ninety-minute reading period is equal to or possibly less than the time our children spend on formal academics, not to mention the reading, writing, and math that happen in the carpentry, cooking, sign- and book-writing they do.

Kindergartners and first graders have work boxes with key words and books of stories they write. They learn *Bank Street* preprimer vocabulary and then begin the *Bank Street* preprimer series. When they have completed that, they read Monster books or the *I Can Read* large-type books. They work with sets and learn to write numbers, then begin simple addition and subtraction. Each of these areas needs to be done twice a week, and later in the year for first graders, more often. There are also phonics games, occasionally.

First graders do some of this work, and other skill-building activities, during the afternoon work time, which will be described next, but, with the kindergartners, most of their work is done after the activities have wound down, from 10:30 until clean-up. Some then approach a teacher and ask to do their work. Some never do, and so the teachers must remind them and negotiate with them on a time to work. Often this is simple. The teachers wait until a child is finished with an activity and before she has chosen another. At these individual transition times we suggest doing work now and when the teacher is sure of herself and approaches firmly, the children respond positively. Overheard:

Teacher: *It's time to do your work now.*
Child: *No!*
Teacher: *Where do you want to do it?*
Child: *On top of the structure.*

Some children are *always* involved and so at some point must be pried out of their work and convinced to do their work boxes. It's best if the teacher gives them a warning and says she will return in a few minutes with the boxes. Overheard:

Teacher: *In five minutes I will return with your work boxes.*
Child: *I already did it today.* (Fortunately, the teacher knows she did it day before yesterday. She isn't lying. Time past is relative; day before yesterday to an adult seems like just today to her.)
Teacher: *No, you must do it today. I'll come in five minutes.*
Child: *Ten minutes?*
Teacher: *Seven minutes.*
Child: *Eight?*
Teacher: *Seven.*

Choices impress children, even if they're only apparent. If, when you, the teacher, return, the child is still industriously digging and you can get her to stop temporarily and finish the tasks there, so much the better. If you must remove her from the situation in order for her to concentrate, this one works: "You have a choice. You can walk to the (wherever she's decided to work) or I can carry you." She can choose *how*, but not *whether*.

Sometimes choosing *where* turns into a wonderful game. "No, not here. Let's go over there." Once there, "No, over there," ad infinitum. Then you end up doing them wherever you put your foot down, much to the relief of all involved, and often the child will stay twenty minutes if you have it to give. You can both have just as nice a time together doing sets and numbers as you can being led around by the nose--better, actually.

The structure necessitates this kind of negotiation because there isn't any one place or time when learning is supposed to happen. As one wise old second grader said, musing on his first two years in Adventure Yard, "We learned to write and we didn't even have desks!"

Second and third graders do have desks, of their own design and making. They are in the multipurpose room, which we have designated a "work room" for the older children. It is also their talking room. They feel free to go over and sit and chat, trade marbles and pens (Piaget preserve us!), and tease each other. At times the noise level rises. Some children like to work in noise, and are able to make large amounts of it while getting their work done--some math, some reading, and some writing in their journals. Those who don't like the noise take their things and go outside to work, or a teacher comes in and is requested to quiet things down. The physical structure of the room and desks make it easier to direct the older children to their work. They also have the after-story time to finish what they haven't done in the morning.

It is fascinating to watch them structure their time. Some get everything done in the morning so they will have forty minutes free time to talk, draw, and horse around. Others calmly set about their work and get it done then. Some don't get everything finished in the forty minutes, so we send them over to do one subject during the morning. Some procrastinate--a couple hate math and, oh, the stalling games they play. Others "can't think of anything to write" in their journals until 1:59:36'. There are those who do what they know is required; others enjoy sneaking by to see if the teachers will catch them (cognitive conceit again); to some, these tasks are so much less important than what is going on in their own heads that it is hard to bother. According to one at Monday class meeting, "I spent all day Friday digging that hole. I didn't do any of my work because I thought the hole was more important, and over the weekend, somebody came and filled it in!"--his voice rising to a note of furious indignation at the waste of his valuable time.

For some of the children, teachers serve as resources--help in spelling, givers of math papers. At Millard Canyon, I wanted to see if I could squeeze into a crevice the second graders could get in, and one said, "You can't get stuck. You give me my math." They enjoy their work and do it willingly. For others we are policemen or nags. Probably no form of structure can erase these individual differences--possibly one which awards M&M's or points toward diving watches, but I'd much rather nag on the slow days. There are always days when the work goes well in and of itself for even the most reluctant, and they are worth the trouble. "See, you're really a lot better at math than you think." Then, "Remember how well it went yesterday? These problems are just like those." For the journal people, "It's important to write something, for the practice. I know you don't have an inspiration every day. I have a poetry journal and I don't write a poem because I'm supposed to."

We have had two-fold discussions about how when you're sad or angry and you try to do something, you can mess it up because you feel so rotten. Also that there are times when something is really important and you have to be able to put your rotten feelings aside and do what needs to be done right now. Interventions that deal with heavy feelings--sometimes two children will come up from lunch really angry with each other--might be to insist on getting on with the business at hand, or to go outside with the children and resolve the feud. There is such a delicate relationship between emotions of self-esteem and academic performance that I would never want to be locked into a structure where I couldn't make my own decisions about which was more important in any given situation.

(6) First grade work time. I put an asterisk by the work time for first graders in the main room from 1:15 to 1:30. This can be a very difficult time. At the beginning of the year we expected the children to do academics much the way the older children did, but it became obvious that some of them were really too worn-out after the Arroyo to do the strenuous small-muscle, eye-hand control tasks usually required. We did cognitively-oriented games and read stories. As the year went on and the children got older, they could do more and we began to plan three cognitive games or activities and limit their choices to these during this time.

I am convinced that one of the elements making this a difficult plan to carry out is that we had just radically reduced the choices children could make in a setting where they were used to moving freely, selecting what they wanted from the shelves, and using it for their own plans. The environment continued to give the kinds of messages to the children that it had given all morning. The only things in the room that demanded this different pattern of behavior were the teachers. We required that they do only what we had selected for them to do and we restricted the flow from indoors to outdoors. Only when they could be convinced that we really meant business would they cooperate during this time. I've sometimes felt as if I was swimming upstream, but it seemed important to give these children some experience with a tighter structure for fifteen minutes a day. In observing the very low tolerance some of the children have for even this moderately tight structure, I feel a hint of what it must be for teacher and students to try to force themselves into a traditional structure five hours a day, five days a week, for twelve to sixteen years. It gives me a headache.

(7) Afternoon free time. When the children have completed their expectations, they are free to go outside and mess around. Children look forward to this time as a time when they can be in the yard without being interfered with a great deal by adults, where there are *no* expectations to do work or be creative or anything. It is a very relaxed time. Understandably some people get bored and show poor judgment in their choices of things to mess around with--like having olive pit vs. cedar cone battles. Younger children really don't know what's okay and what's not, so teachers have to say "no" to them a lot, with a reminder that there are many okay things here to do.

From a Child's Point of View

I was thinking about how the day might look through the eyes of one of the first graders, who is always into something I have to get him out of. Somewhere during all this redirecting, I've come to know him, and to love him a lot. This is the first time I've ever gotten any sense of what he might be going through, so I want to share it. It's kind of sad.

Class meeting is a place where you are supposed to be on time, more or less. It's a place where you are supposed to sit quietly, more or less, regardless of whether you feel like running, yelling, hiding, or finishing your birdhouse. It's a place where you are supposed to listen, even though the third graders think special rocks are dumb and laugh at little kids' pictures. It's a place where you are supposed to share, even if nobody believes you have a pony because yesterday you claimed to have lost twenty teeth more than anybody and last week you said you got your own T.V., and you wish you did.

Waiting for lunch you're not supposed to go anywhere or hit anybody, so there's nothing to do but wait and make a lot of noise. Sometimes your mom comes to pick up your little brother and doesn't even say "hi," and then you feel so bad you just want to hide in her car, but a teacher yells at you and makes you hurry to the dumb Arroyo.

At lunch you can't go off by yourself because the teachers are worried about weird people you've never seen. And either you get hot and tired and want to leave and can't 'cause everybody goes back at the same time, or you've just made a good fort and you have to go back 'cause everybody goes back at the same time. Waiting to go up from lunch, you're not supposed to run off or hit anybody, but there's nothing else to do except wait and make a lot of noise.

After the story is over (if it is worth listening to) you have to stop drawing your picture. It will take at least a half-hour to finish it while you tell your friend the whole story of what's happening to the boats in it. But the teachers insist that you have to do one of these three other things. You can think of much better things to do outside. Stay in here, they say. You can think of much better things to do with the scissors and paper on the shelf. But it's not okay to get them off the shelf now. (It is okay to get them off the shelf in the morning, and will be again after 1:45, so why not now? Because the teachers say no.) Go do that or that or that. Some choice! That's not what you consider a choice; who does she think she's fooling?

After work time, there's time to play. It's not okay to paint on the trees or to have an olive pit/pine cone war--even if they *are* soft--sort of. It's not okay to get the pliers and turn the water on full-blast--it's so much nicer when it comes out fast and sprays than that dribble the teachers like. It's not okay to see if you can smash the garbage can by jumping on it. So why are the paints out? Why do the trees have olives? Why is the garbage can there, anyway???? Why do some of the kids do things and they're okay, and other kids (you) do things and they're not okay? Maybe you're not okay. It seems like you go from one thing to the next, with a teacher hot on your tail saying, "No. Not that." "Oh, not that either," and, "*Of course*, not that." It's enough to make you go hide in Molly's structure and not come back forever...*Hey, they're making pretzels!*

By the time we are adults, the behavior patterns expected in most settings are fairly clear to us, unless we've never been there before. (I'm never sure what to do with myself in a smoky bar, and I would have no idea how to behave if I were to be teleported into the midst of a Yahi Indian harvest feast.) We learn how close to stand to people when we talk to them, which seats to take on a half-filled bus. (We take an empty double one if possible; only when all the isolated spaces are already taken do we ask to sit next to a stranger. If we were Balinese, we would take a seat near someone and the empty doubles would be taken last.)

We know that garbage cans cost money and that the probability of someone getting hit in the eye with an olive pit is great enough to make it too risky to have an olive pit war, although we may still engage in snowball fights--no ice balls allowed--and consider the possibility of frostbite or broken legs remote enough to be negligible. We have some sense of time that tells us when not to start something interesting because we'll get interrupted soon; we may even have a watch on. We have learned to turn ourselves off on command and we have learned to sit quietly and do nothing while waiting for someone to tell us what to do next. We have learned to be bored gracefully, and not to hurt people's feelings when they tell bad jokes, even jokes that are an affront to our most sacred values or our self-esteem. We have learned to accept what people say even when what they do gives us a different message. ("How are you?" "Fine.") We have learned to leave well enough alone, not to rock the boat, to cooperate, and to compromise. This may sound very cynical. It's not meant to be, entirely. For we know enough about behavior settings to be strategists, too. We know how to compromise in order to strengthen our bargaining position. We have enough of an overview to say in a given situation, "This is not important enough to protest," or, "This is intolerable." We can wait in line for four hours to get tickets to sit and hear a virtuoso performance of Ravi Shankar or Yehudi Menuhin that makes our tired feet worth it a thousand times over.

Children cannot do these things yet, nor do they know their value. They haven't enough experience to know what to expect, nor can they rank emotions in order of priority. Even after six or seven years, the world is still so new. There are so many expectations that go beyond the comprehension of a child. I see my first grade friend, shuffling to Molly's structure with his head down a little, and I'm very glad I'm not six anymore. A couple of minutes later, I watch him climb to the top of the spools, down over the bars, hang for an instant, give his feet a kick, arch out into space, and land, plop, in the sand--to scurry back into the hole at the bottom, and start up again--and I wish I could recover so fast.

Summary: Behavior Settings and Piagetian Psychology

It is possible to discuss the adult's role as authority and the child's response to it, using both Piaget's theory of stages and Barker's concept of behavior settings at the same time.

In any behavior setting, the responses of Adventure Yard children fall into two categories. Preoperational children are aware that there are expectations for the situation and believe that they conform to them. In reality they do not, and their out-of bounds behavior arises from a whim or suggestion of another child that seems by their logic to be a perfectly acceptable variation of the rules. Concrete operational children are becoming keenly aware of the expectations of a setting which demand that they change their behavior in conformity to a code external to themselves. When they are not clear what these expectations are, they push limits in order to find out; often when they are sure, they willingly conform. However, they do not always willingly surrender their former freedom to follow internal motivations. Adults personify for them the external coercive power which behavior settings have upon all of us, and they take great delight in sabotaging the settings by defying the adult, and proving their own immunity to control--for the moment at least.

The adult's response to children's inappropriate behavior falls into two categories. She must decide if the internal needs of the child should take precedence or if she must keep the behavior setting intact. These two considerations are not always in opposition, because one of the developmental needs of children at this age is for clearly defined, consistent behavior settings, and the most appropriate response to the child's testing is to require conformity to the behavior setting. There are other times when the child is struggling with a personal issue that transcends the normal expectations of behavior settings. Open classrooms do not have to be such rigid places that the teacher must always decide in favor of maintaining group control or conformity to the setting. If it is rich enough, children will continue doing constructive things without her for awhile. When a child is shattered by the rebuff of a peer, or by the collapse of the fort she has been building for three days, or by a reminder that her family is in a state of crisis, the teacher can be there to support her. Even if the disaster occurs at a time when she is needed to pull the group together, she may decide it's more important to let the rest of the children do class meeting without her while she takes the one child where they can both have some quiet and privacy. (It just hit me that getting privacy also removes one from the behavior setting and its coercive expectations.) Having other adults in the classroom makes this less of an either/or situation.

There are times, though, when the setting demands that all of its members conform, regardless of their feelings at the moment. These are almost exclusively situations in which safety is involved--driving on the freeway, visiting a factory with open machinery. At times I feel that when we are guests in another person's home or patrons of a public facility, such as a library, we must insist that children put aside their problems and respect the hospitality or privilege offered us--in all but the most extreme circumstances.

Behavior settings and their power over us are a fact of life. That their power is not absolute is the basic premise of humanistic psychology. Over and over, Piaget demands that schools teach children more than conformity. He advocates a style of education that develops the moral conscience of individuals. He believes this grows out of experiences of mutual agreement and mutual respect. It is possible to structure a classroom where these experiences are possible between children and children, between children and adults. The critical factor in achieving this structure is the teacher's willingness to intervene in the children's lives from a reciprocal, not a unilateral, position.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS: GAMES

Maintaining a reciprocal relationship with children in an open classroom is not always easy. Maintaining a unilateral relationship with children in a traditional classroom is not always easy either. Maintaining *any* kind of relationship with forty people at one time isn't easy. There are complications. These complications do not always have to do with the developmental needs or structural expectations we have discussed. Complications arise whenever human beings attempt to relate to each other across the gap between their private realities. They are personal and interpersonal dynamics, and to omit them would be to touch only a part of the teacher's role as authority in the open classroom.

Children approach relationships in four different ways:

1. Psychological experiments. "What will you do if I push this button?" (The button may be a tangible one with a "do not touch" sign--a fire alarm, for example, or the precarious tower on another child's sand castle. Or it may be a psychological button. "What will she do if I call her 'Honky'?") A study in human reactions. Many children are fascinated by anger, embarrassment, laughter on the part of another. They are intrigued with the possibility that their actions can evoke such responses in a predictable manner.

2. Trust testing. "Can I trust you to mean what you say? Are you consistent and reliable; can I depend on you?"

3. Spontaneous sharing. Within an already established trusting relationship, "I like you and you like me. Let's wrestle. Let's play house. Come see my bug. I just read this whole book."

4. Games. Standard "games people play," crossed transactions (which will be defined below). An endless futile drain of energy. Children play games with other children, with adults. Any kind of adult intervention can turn into a game if both parties are susceptible.

Values and patterns of behavior change slowly. I knew who I wanted to be as a teacher long before I was able to even begin to act that way. In a pinch, I still find myself responding out of old feelings of anger, propriety, hurt pride, or fear. The discrepancy between my ideal self and my reactive self is at times painful. A child will stall doing her math paper, resist cleaning up, or refuse to stop taunting another child, and my response may be to come on with a heavy negative reaction. Instead of cooperating, shamed and subdued, she will resist or defy even more and we are locked into a battle of wills, with no face-saving way out for either of us. This is a game, in the sense Eric Berne uses in *Games People Play* (1964). As he points out, there's nothing fun about these kinds of games; they are deadly serious and usually very uncomfortable. I find them exhausting. Why, then, do we play them?

Every individual has a need to have her presence recognized by other human beings. This is "stimulus hunger" and "recognition hunger." An act of recognition by another is a "stroke," in transactional jargon (Berne, 1964, p. 14). An interaction--or "transaction"--between people is an exchange of strokes, a mutual recognition of existence. The transaction may be positive or negative, and it is important to remember that even a negative transaction is better than none at all. It is better to be recognized as a "dummy" or "fatso" than to be discounted and ignored.

There is a third hunger, "structure hunger," and by this Berne means the need to structure time in order to avoid boredom. This is called "programming," and people do it in three ways. *Material programming* is a project or an activity with a goal, the "I, Thou, It" David Hawkins refers to in his paper by the same title (Hawkins, 1970). Stroking occurs in the context of the activity and is a by-product. Some children or groups of children prefer to get their strokes this way; others don't, and are much more interested in direct interactions than in doing or making things together. *Social programming* results in traditional ritualistic or semi-ritualistic interchanges--good manners, polite conversations. Much that has been said about behavior settings applies here; what is appropriate programming for one setting is not for another. Berne calls interactions which are regulated by social programming "rituals" and "pastimes." As people get better acquainted, more *individual programming* begins to occur. "Incidents" interrupt the flow of normal, expected social programming. These incidents appear random, but tend to follow definite patterns. They have unspoken rules and are "games." Games and pastimes are substitutes for genuine relationships or intimacy. Intimacy begins when individual programming and social programming break down. Then people are able to accept each other as they are and participate in spontaneous, loving interactions without ulterior motives (Berne, 1964).

One of the greatest advantages in redefining the teacher's authority in the open classroom is that she becomes increasingly free of the traditional social programming to be an expert and a disciplinarian, and can participate in spontaneous, loving relationships with the children. The biggest obstacle to this, however, is game-playing. Because games are individual patterns of interacting on an emotional level, changes in the structure of the classroom or one's intellectual conception of the child do not alter them.

The concepts of reciprocity and unilaterality are still useful here, however. I was very interested to read Piaget's comment that there is an adult in every child and a child in every adult, because one of the most helpful tools in my attempt to stop playing games with the children has been to use the transactional analysis description of the three ego states--Parent, Adult, and Child--to figure out what happened.

There are changes in behavior that occur within a setting and which are accompanied by shifts in feeling, by different psychic attitudes. These changes occur with the shifting from one *ego state* to another. An ego state is a coherent system of feelings and behavior patterns which constitutes a distinct psychological reality. There are three categories of ego state: 1) ego states which resemble those of parental figures; 2) ego states which are autonomously directed toward objective appraisal of reality; and 3) ego states which represent archaic relics, still-active ego states which were fixated in early childhood. They are called Parent, Adult, and Child in the terminology of transactional analysis.[4]

> *The position is, then, that any given moment each individual in a social aggregation will exhibit a Parental, Adult, or Child ego state, and that individuals can shift with varying degrees of readiness from one ego state to another...*
>
> *The implications are:*
> *1) That every individual has had parents (or substitute parents) and that he carries within him a set of ego states that reproduce the ego states of those parents (as he perceived them), and that these parental ego states can be activated under certain circumstances...Colloquially: "Everyone carries his parents around inside him."*
>
> *2) That every individual (including children...) is capable of objective data processing if the appropriate ego state can be activated...Colloquially: "Everyone has an Adult."*
>
> *3) That every individual was once younger than he is now, and that he carries within him fixated relics from earlier years which will be activated under certain circumstances...Colloquially: "Everyone carries a little boy or girl around inside of him."* (Berne, 1964, pp. 23-24)

Each ego state has a vital function in the human personality. The Child has two components--adapted and natural. The adapted Child modifies her behavior under the Parental influence, complying or rebelling. The natural Child is spontaneous, intuitive, creative, and is the source of pleasure and drive. It also harbors feelings of low self-esteem, hurt feelings, and rejection. The Adult is necessary for survival. It processes data and estimates probabilities for success or failure in such endeavors as crossing the street in time to avoid oncoming cars and balancing the checkbook. The Adult mediates between Parent and Child within the personality and regulates the activities of both. The Parent enables the individual to parent her own children. It makes many responses automatic, conserving time and energy by freeing the Adult from the necessity of making innumerable trivial decisions. The Parent looks both ways before crossing the street and brushes one's teeth before going to bed. It remembers which fork to use and to thank the host before leaving. It is also a nag, more or less, depending on the way the individual perceived his parents as a child. It is the force for righteous indignation, anger, and fear of what others might think, and can contribute to the Child's low self-esteem and feeling of rejection.

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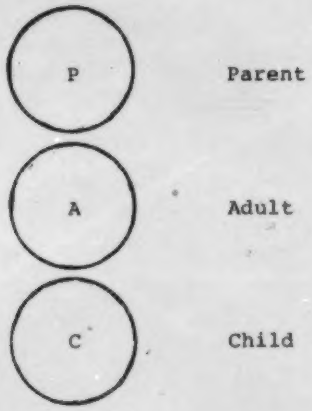
[4] Transactional analysis will be abbreviated T.A., and T.A. terminology is referred to as "Colloquial." The ego states Parent, Adult, and Child are distinguished from parents, adults, and children by the use of capital letters.

In T.A., a personality looks like this:



Colloquially, an interaction between two people is called a "transaction." If two or more people encounter each other, sooner or later one of them will probably give the other some indication that she acknowledges the other's presence. This is the "transactional stimulus." The other person will say or do something which is in some way related to this stimulus. This is the "transactional response." Simple transactional analysis is concerned with diagnosing which ego state gave the stimulus and which made the response.[5]

Some transactions are *complementary*:

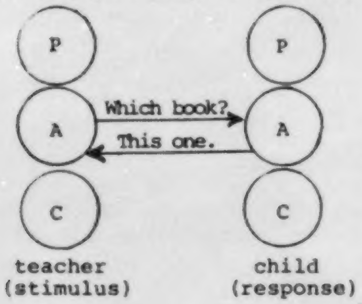
1) The Adult of the teacher asks the Adult of the child, "Which of these books do you want to read?" The Adult of the child replies, "That one," and selects a book she thinks will be fun to read.

2) The child gets a cut and comes to the teacher. The teacher's nurturing Parent washes it off and puts a bandaid on it.

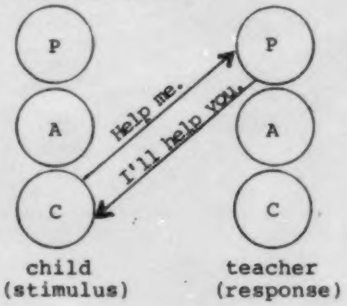
3) One child says, "I just found the keenest bug. Come and see." The Child of her friends, and the Child of the teacher, run after her to look at it. (Berne, 1964)

Berne uses pictures of ego states to clarify the transactions.

1)



2)



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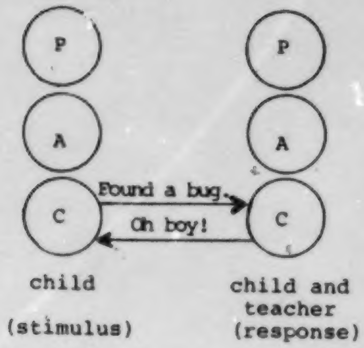
[5] I personally don't like to use the terms Parent, Adult, and Child in dealing directly with children. The terms seem pejorative in a situation between a grown-up and a kid, where to tell the child to get out of her Child and into her Adult, when I, an adult, am in my own Child or Parent and being totally pigheaded, seems rather an affront to her integrity and my honesty.

3)


P
P
A
A
C
Found a bug.
Oh boy!
C
child
(stimulus)
child and teacher
(response)

The arrows are vectors. They show the transmitter and the recipient of the transactional stimulus and the transactional response. In complementary transactions, the vectors run parallel, and as in mathematics, they can go on infinitely. The course of complementary transactions is smooth; the feelings are usually positive. Both pastimes and intimacy occur through complementary transactions.

When transactions are crossed, either the communication breaks down and one or both parties withdraw, or a "game" begins--a series of crossed transactions. The series proceeds according to the rules of the particular game being played.

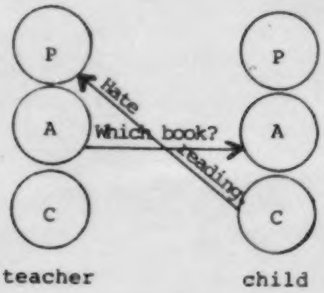
Some examples of crossed transactions are:

1) Teacher: *Which of these books do you want to read?*
Child: *I don't want to read any of these books. They're baby books and I hate reading. I just read yesterday and you promised we could pop popcorn today.*

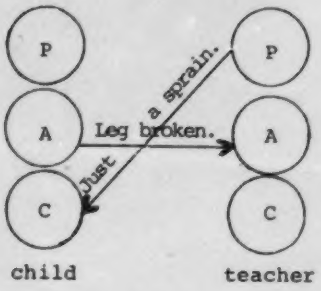
2) Child (with broken leg): *My leg is broken.*
Teacher: *No, it's just a sprain, nothing serious.*

3) Child: *I just found a bug. Come and see.*
Teacher: *Don't you know not to interrupt the reading group over a bug? You are inconsiderate, and bugs are much less important than learning to read. Besides, you're supposed to be working in your workbook.*

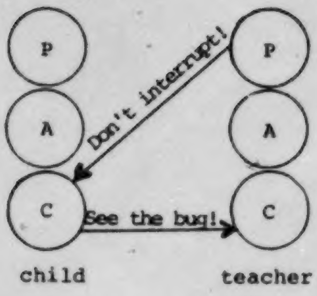
1)


P
P
Hate reading
A
Which book?
A
C
C
teacher
child

2)


P
Just a sprain.
P
A
Leg broken.
A
C
C
child
teacher

3)



In transaction (1), when the child strikes out of her obviously hurting Child at both you, the teacher, and the books you offer, you have a choice. You can stay in your Adult and try to reason with her. "Yesterday you read a book very much like this one and you did well," or, "It's 9:30 and you will have plenty of time to do your reading before we begin to pop corn." Hopefully, the child will remember how well it went yesterday and get out of the hurting place inside herself that your stimulus triggered, and shift into her Adult, accepting a book matter-of-factly. If you shift to your Parent and begin to nurture her, "You're really a good reader; I'll help you and you can sit on my lap. Where do you want to sit?," etc., she may get into her Child, and snuggle up and read for you. If you shift into your critical Parent, you're off and running, "Don't start this again. Every time I come to read with you you put up a fuss. You have to read one of these books, and I don't have time to spend waiting on you." The child now feels that not only does she not like reading, she also doesn't like you, and the more you try to make her, the more she dislikes both you and the reading.

In Adventure Yard, where children are making their own decisions about how they will respond to the many requests and orders given them by the several adults in various levels of authority, most children will choose to escalate the game between their Child and the teacher's critical Parent. They know no dire punishment will come to them, so why should they give in? Besides, they have all the time in the world to give to a good game. The child may not dislike you or reading all that much, but if that's how you're going to be about it... Even so, I'd much rather not play, thanks. At times, I say so. "Hey, I don't have time to play that game," or, "I'm sorry I was cross, but it's important for you to read every day and I have more time to help you now than I will later"--a shift from my Parent to my Adult.

It depends on the child and the child's mood--as I understand it--as to whether I try Adult/Adult or Nurturing Parent/O.K. Child. If I'm not feeling O.K. myself, I'll get threatened and come on as Critical Parent.

This use of O.K./not O.K. is from Thomas A. Harris's book, *I'm O.K., You're O.K.*, which is also transactional analysis (Harris, 1967). What he's talking about I think relates to the nature of the attitudes we have toward children in general, toward each specific child, and toward ourselves as teachers. If I respect myself as a person and as a teacher, and I respect the child, then we're both O.K., and I don't have to shore up a sagging ego by getting the best of the child in an argument. I can say, "I'm sorry," or, "I don't want to keep doing this; let's both try to settle this argument better," or, "I know that wasn't a fair thing for me to say."

One of the things that I discovered about myself in teaching is that I really do have a Child inside of me. The children can really hurt my Child's feelings or make my Child so mad I want to get even. My Child is very proud and must have the last word. My Parent, too, gets angry. Inconsiderate behavior makes my Parent indignant. Rude behavior arouses my Parent's sense of propriety. Cruelty of one child to another tears at my Parent's high standards of humanity. I get my buttons pushed a lot. I wonder sometimes why I've chosen to expose them all to forty children, sixty parents, and thirty college students a year.

It's because I'm not controlled by those buttons any more. I can use my Adult to tell my Child that she really can't be so sensitive; it doesn't really matter if Sandy would rather read with Doris than me; that doesn't mean I'm not a good teacher. I use all the Piaget my Adult knows to get my Parent to calm down when a child keeps testing me to see if I really mean "No." I sometimes say, "This isn't really that important; the child's right." Or I say, "This really *is* important. Keep saying 'No' because this isn't a safe or an appropriate thing for the child to do right now."

Hopefully, it is apparent from the examples of crossed transactions I gave that the differences between complementary and crossed transactions can be quite subtle. This leaves room for a great deal of interpretation and misinterpretation. Sometimes, in all innocence, I will say something to a child that is poorly worded, or I will be upset about something else and the child hears my feelings and not my words, thinking the anger is toward her. Not only do I have my own tendencies to initiate crossed transactions, but there is also a great deal of room for misunderstanding in human communication.

As I grow more mature, I can let go of my own narrow perception of reality, of my personal, internal reaction to situations, and so begin to see how very many possible causes or meanings there are for any one incident in the classroom. My responses used to be much more automatic and stereotyped than they are now. I see much more of what is happening around me than just what I want to see or what I expect. I have come to expect and accept a far broader, more realistic range of human behavior.

I use transactional analysis as a tool to help me "decenter"--Piaget's term for the process whereby an individual begins to let go of her egocentric world view (something possessed by adults as well as children) and becomes increasingly able to "situate her ego in its true perspective in relation to the ego of others" (Piaget, 1973, p. 111). This is the prerequisite for establishing true intimacy with others.

SUMMARY

This, then, is my professional filter--my metastructure. Children no longer have to live according to my expectations; I can help them arrive at their own age-appropriate expectations for themselves. Nor do I have to live according to an external standard of "Teacher." I can operate spontaneously, in accordance with the needs of the situation and the individuals in it. I can enter a behavior setting and decide whether its expectations are positive or negative for the children and me. I can create settings that offer children an appropriate range of behavior patterns to choose from, and I can deal with their inevitable need to see what lies beyond the "appropriate," without feeling my competence as a teacher threatened.

There are three crucial aspects of a comprehensive professional filter for the open classroom: 1) an overall attitude toward the value of childhood and an understanding of the ways children--because they are at a particular stage in development--respond to external expectations; 2) an ability to look at a classroom in terms of its structure and to see children's responses as reflecting the quality of the settings they are in, not just as a reflection of their internal states; and 3) an ability to monitor one's own responses to individual situations and to maintain a clear, honest flow of communication.

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6. Developing Social Consciousness in the Primary-Age Child: A Piagetian Perspective

Louise Derman-Sparks and Doris Smith

Introduction

The issues discussed in this paper emerged from discussions among Pacific Oaks College and Children's School faculty, parents, and students over the past year. These were sparked by dissatisfaction with the social aspects of curriculum in the kindergarten-primary group (ages five to nine). The major concerns had to do with the setting of limits for children's behavior in general, and their use of unacceptable language, both profanity and racial slurs, in particular. Staff and parent meetings on several occasions were the scene of disagreement and distress over these issues, which were never fully resolved. Teachers tended to view the children's undesirable behavior as developmentally inevitable (to some degree, at least), while some parents and student teachers wanted the teachers to take a more active role in limiting behavior they considered socially unacceptable.

Over the past five years, the staff has been working carefully with Piagetian theory to transform and interpret the reading and math curricula, but we had neglected to approach social development as systematically. Now we are asking, with greater clarity, How are social consciousness and behavior promoted in a developmental, individualized program with primary-age children--children who are at various transition points from preoperational to concrete operational thinking?

We can't blame Piaget for the one-sided nature of our past work. He has written eloquently about the right to education including "the right to the building of a questioning mind and a dynamic moral conscience" (Piaget, 1973, p. 92), and he has always asserted the inseparability of cognitive and social development in the construction of intelligence. The following interchange between Piaget and Richard Evans, in the course of a wide-ranging interview, illustrates this point:

> Evans: *I gather that you would approve of educators' applying Rousseau's learn-by-knowing, learn-by-experience notions?*
>
> Piaget: *Yes, quite right. Only Rousseau forgot the social aspects. There is only the teacher and Emile.*
>
> Evans: *There's more to the world?*
>
> Piaget: *Yes, there is a collective Emile.* (Evans, 1973, p. 52)

Defining the Problem and Some Theoretical Considerations

While staff of the primary program were not as clear about how to approach social development as about how to approach cognitive development, our goals for the former were considerable. We were aware that traditional primary classrooms had a semblance of social order, but this order was clearly established by the school or teachers, on the basis of what Piaget characterizes as a relationship of unilateral respect and moral restraint. This relationship, which is typical between adults and children, involves rules initiated and maintained by adults, which children are obligated to obey. Children's understanding of rules and moral judgments, which are learned in the context of unilateral respect, is described by Piaget as moral realism. Behavior is judged only by its empirical results, without any concern for intent. Rules are believed to be absolute, created by authority, unchangeable, and obeyed because punishment will otherwise result.

In contrast, Piaget theorizes about the development of moral reasoning, based on an understanding of the need for moral behavior in order to maintain social relationships of cooperation and reciprocity. This kind of morality is constructed by the child from experience in relationships of mutual respect--typically peer relationships in which both parties can equally initiate, disagree, and come to agreement on rules.

Piaget believes that morality based on mutual respect is internalized and acted on, regardless of whether or not authority is present. Intent and extenuating circumstances, as well as consequences, are considered in making moral judgments.

Within the context of Piagetian theory, a morality based on mutual respect and reciprocity is a critical element in the development of our full human potential. Piaget poses the question thus:

> *Do we wish to form people who are subjected to the restraints of earlier generations and traditions, or do we wish rather to form simultaneously free consciences and individuals who respect the rights and freedom of others?* (Piaget, 1973, p. 110)

Our goal in the primary program was to facilitate development based on reciprocity and spontaneous mutual respect. We first tried to do this by giving the children ample opportunity for spontaneous peer interaction. However, we observed *less*, rather than more, cooperation over time. Acting-out behavior increased, so that at times we were compelled to return to the position of rule-makers and enforcers. As a result, we had unintentionally created a dichotomy for the children: either do it yourselves or do as we (adults) say.

Our experience with developmental curriculum in other areas helped us to realize that we had not provided a classroom structure that appropriately matched where the children were. We needed to facilitate transitional experiences. Coincidentally, at about this time, Lawrence Kohlberg visited our campus* and joined our by-now provocative dialogue. He emphasized that we really must not step over stages. His experiences have often proved that liberal, "open," active classroom teachers resist that stage which he calls "law and order." Children cannot achieve cooperation and reciprocity without first experiencing the process of the establishment of rules by a social body, and the consequences of those rules.

That's the critical issue. We had missed the dialectic relationship which Piaget proposes as basic to the development of the morality of cooperation. Individual autonomy is a necessary part. However, we had mistakenly defined autonomy as an individual's doing his/her own thing. Piaget defines autonomy as characterized "by submission of the self to rules (*nomia*), which the child sets himself (*auto*), or which he works out freely in cooperation with his peers" (Piaget and Inhelder, 1969, p. 115).

When quoting this definition, we have been asked, "How can a child be independent if he submits himself to rules?" Within a Piagetian perspective, individual autonomy is not destroyed by obligation to others. On the contrary, a dialectic, formative relationship exists between the development of the self and the development of awareness and respect for others. Mutual respect, out of which an internalized morality of cooperation is constructed, is

> *...recognizable from the fact that individuals obligated by it participate in the elaboration of the rule that obligates them. Mutual respect...engenders a new type of obligation which no longer imposes only ready-made rules but also the method that creates them. This method is none other than reciprocity... the mutual coordination of points of view and actions.* (Piaget, 1973, p. 117)

Ethical growth, which includes development from an egocentric to an autonomous viewpoint, implies an individual's being able to

> *...situate his ego in its true perspective in relation to the ego of others. He inserts it into a system of reciprocity which implies simultaneously an independent discipline and a basic de-centering of his own activity.* (Piaget, 1973, pp. 111-112)

We had been mainly concerned with facilitating independent discipline and neglecting the other dialectic aspect. The structure of the classroom needs to reflect both. Kohlberg, in conversation, mentioned some intriguing evidence which suggested that how an individual perceives the community he is in affects what stage solution he chooses to use. A hierarchical authoritarian structure or an anarchistic authoritarian one will inhibit the emergence of morality based on mutual respect relationships.

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*Kohlberg delivered the Tenth Annual Evangeline Burgess Memorial Lecture at Pacific Oaks, "Moral Development and the Dilemmas of Moral Education," on April 20, 1977.

Curriculum Proposals

The essence of the transitional experience for primary-age children lies in the importance of their involvement in the process. The issues dealt with must be *their* moral conflicts, *their* dilemmas. We, as facilitators, should always be alert for clues and opportunities. Sometimes this social consciousness process will occur through issues of social values, conduct of the classroom, or perhaps operation of a game. The children must experience that what *they* do makes a difference--hence their input is essential. The teacher must learn to be a facilitator, not a rule-maker.

For example, a teacher took a group of children to a park. Only five tickets remained for the tram. The teacher said to her group, "We have a problem. There are ten children and only five tickets. What shall we do?" Children suggested eenie-meenie and other traditional solutions. The group collectively rejected these. Then one boy said, "I know. I'll choose one and four of my friends." The group eagerly agreed that this was a good idea, and the teacher went along with it. He did choose himself and four friends. They went on the tram.

The subsequent discussions on and off the tram generated by that experience were rich and real. Several alternative plans were formulated for another time. The chooser himself was not so sure that his was such a great solution. The impact of the fact that what they, the children, did made a difference was most apparent.

A question we are asked often is, What about psychological safety? We are not abdicating the teacher's role. She remains responsible, and she also allows for risk-taking within safe parameters. In academic areas we do not get disturbed by "errors." In fact, we value them for their indication of the child's thinking. We must also learn, as adults, to value the group's collective "social errors"--as long as the involvement is real.

Our classic example of a controversial social issue--one that has caused considerable confusion among parents and staff--is "What kind of language shall be allowed in the classroom?" For awhile, we were able to generate only two possibilities: either the adults made the rules, or everyone did what he/she wished. The more sophisticated understanding we now have provides an alternative possibility. If the group establishes rules and sanctions--their rules--about language in school, the situation will be more alive, workable, and reflective of the group.

The difficult part of this process for teachers is that the group may find solutions which are not necessarily optimum. For instance, through discussion (in which the teacher participates), the group might establish the rule that bad language is acceptable when one is hurt by inanimate objects, or when something doesn't work, but that it is unacceptable with humans. For some children or adults, this would be going too far; for some it would be far enough. The process of rule-making is not a finite one. There is always new input, new information, which will call for reevaluation and different solutions.

Here is a situation in which there was a conflict of viewpoint between children and adults: a group of boys built a playhouse and put a sign on it stating, "NO GIRLS ALLOWED." Since the playhouse was outdoors, everyone walking by had an opportunity to see it. A number of Pacific Oaks faculty, parents, and college students objected on the grounds that allowing such a sign reinforced sexist attitudes and behavior. However, the children's position was, "But everybody can't fit in it." How do we solve a complex conflict such as this, between children's need to choose and define the limits of their peer group and to have privacy for this group, and adults' concern about facilitating non-sexist attitudes and self-concepts? How do we work with children so that they can gradually come to discover and understand the real issues involved?

This particular situation was resolved through the intervention of the school maintenance person. When the boys asked him for paint for their playhouse, it was offered on the condition that the NO GIRLS ALLOWED sign be removed. He carefully explained how and why he thought the sign was unfair. The boys did as he asked, so that they could get their paint.

On one hand, this resolution facilitated the children's understanding of what values are important to adult members of their community. On the other hand, we have wondered what would have happened if there had been an ongoing process of negotiation between the adults and children on this issue, and a search for new solutions. Such an approach might have turned what seemed an impasse, soluble only by adult authority, into an active, problem-solving experience, involving the mutual coordination of points of view and actions of both adults and children.

In attempting to understand the dimensions of integrating social consciousness curriculum into our program, we have found that adults must learn to be aware of how one's own sociocultural experience affects the interpretation and implementation of developmental theory. Years ago, one of the authors worked as a preschool teacher in a black community. One aspect of the job involved interviewing the parents for developmental potentials of their children. Most reported that their children walked between nine and eleven months. The research staff interpreted these reports as indicating that parents had either forgotten or were exaggerating, because the time didn't fit established developmental norms. But now, it turns out that there are new research data which indicate that, in fact, black children's physical development tends to be accelerated in comparison to norms based on white children. Ethnocentric reading of data under the guise of theory can blind us to new information.

Another aspect of our ethnocentrism can involve using developmental theory to argue for our values, in situations that require value clarification *before* developmental theory is called upon. One example of this is the bad language issue. Adults who were opposed to it found it difficult to communicate with staff who said that children were using it because they were egocentric and experimenting. The former group, mainly parents, tended to hear this explanation as meaning, "offensive language is O.K.," while the latter staff group tended to hear parents as saying, "I don't care about developmental theory." Mutual respect dialogue between the adults concerned is called for, so that our own de-centering process is facilitated, leading to more complex understanding and interpretation of developmental theory.

Such ongoing dialogue between staff and parents is essential if "pedagogical research" into the most productive ways to foster social growth and consciousness is to be effective. There is great need to build trusting relationships with parents through a variety of formal and informal means. The key is to create ways for parents to be involved in the actual process of creating new approaches, including being informed, being able to observe, and to give feedback in an ongoing manner.

In this regard, it is pertinent to quote a less well-known aspect of Piaget's thinking, which appears in his discussion of Article 26 of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Relating to one of the clauses, which states, "Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children," Piaget writes

> *Movements for collaboration between the family and the school have been launched, especially where the new type of education is beginning to be important. They have proved to be of inestimable value and beneficial to both sides. The school has everything to gain by knowing what the reactions of the parents are, and the latter find increasing advantage in being initiated into the problems of the school. A close relationship between teachers and parents thus leads to much more than mutual informational exchange: these exchanges are reciprocally advantageous and often lead to real improvement in methods* (underlining author's). (Piaget, 1973, p. 84)

A challenge exists for the restructuring of social relationships and the social environment of our classrooms, just as we learned how to restructure the cognitive aspects.

This year's staff in the kindergarten-primary program--building on our past mistakes, as all learners must--has developed greater clarity about the kind of limits needed to provide the psychological safety within which children can work out their understanding of moral issues. The discussion which follows reflects this increased clarity, as well as our ongoing questions.

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7. Children's Words That Bother Adults

A Symposium

Children's Program's Staff*

Setting Limits

Doris: *What do you do when children use abusive language? What do you consider abusive language?*

Molly S.: *I will step in in four cases: if children's words are 1) racist; 2) sexist; 3) a put-down that really attacks the other's self-esteem, like "Dummy," "Stupid," that kind of thing; or 4) exclusions like "You can't come in here."*

Often when a small child says this, what he means is, "I don't know you. Are you safe?" An older child may mean something different. I think it's important that adults step in with words, that we understand where children's words are coming from and try to help them learn how to say what they mean.

Doris: *What do you do if someone is so frustrated that the words just come out of his mouth?*

Molly S.: *If one child, playing in the sandbox, calls another an "asshole bastard," I step in at once with "What do you really want to tell him?" And the child comes back with "Get your foot off my road!" And I say, "Then say that, because when you come up with all those names, how does he know that you want his foot off your road?" Indeed, I give permission to express anger, but I turn it back--because the child has been name-calling rather than giving a straight message. I give him a straight message that he can hear, and I help him to formulate his own.*

Doris: *Are there times when you don't intervene?*

Molly S.: *When an adult does nothing in response to a child's words, the nonverbal message to the child whose mouth the words are coming out of is, "What I'm saying is all right." The recipient hears either, "What he's saying is all*

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*This is an edited transcript of two discussions which took place on November 28 and December 12, 1977, among the following people:

Doris Smith, Children's Programs Coordinator
Nancy Place, teacher, kindergarten-primary (Adventure Yard)
Gwen Brown, teacher, kindergarten-primary
Jackie Roberto, teacher, kindergarten-first
Molly Scudder, teacher, transitional kindergarten
Mae Varon, teacher, preschool
Ellen Varon, teacher, preschool
Carole Herman, teacher, two- and three-year-olds
Molly Noxon, teacher, infant-toddlers
Yolanda Torres, teacher, day care
Charlotte Allen, teacher, day care
Kathy Malaske, teacher, day care
Stephanie Beukema, teaching fellow, kindergarten-primary
Patti Newman, teaching fellow, preschool
Karen Neubert, art consultant
Nancy Evans, parent, kindergarten-primary
Carolyn Walker, parent, kindergarten-primary and Steering Committee chairperson
Betty Jones, teacher, college
Liz Prescott, teacher, college
Louise Derman-Sparks, teacher, college
Carol Phillips, teacher, college and multicultural coordinator

right," or, "I am what he says I am."

I don't want that to happen. That's why I don't ignore it.

Mae: *I am really concerned about the child who reacts, "Then that's how I really am." That makes me feel I have to intervene.*

Ellen: *What's happening to the child who's always calling others names--in terms of his own self-concept? How must his relationships be, if that's his main way of interacting? What might we want to do there in terms of intervention, giving him other kinds of communication that would not be putting down other people? I don't think I'd choose to ignore that. I think that would really be a signal for me that I need to help.*

Nancy P.: *A child who does it is usually the most afraid, the most insecure. If you have to acquire self-esteem by putting others down, that's a real shaky place to be. It takes a two-pronged approach--one is that you stop that behavior, but the other is that you do whatever you can to build that child up.*

Mae: *How do you stop the behavior? Exactly how does the conversation go?*

Nancy P.: *It depends on the specific situation. If a child calls me a "motherfuckin' bitch," I'll tell thet child that that's really offensive to me, that I do not like it, that I treat him with respect, and I expect him to treat me with respect.*

In a case where a child is just yelling profanities because it's interesting, like sitting up in the tree and making up a rhyme about whatever he's making up a rhyme about, I'll tell him flat out that it really upsets people when that kind of language is heard. Not that it's good or bad or any of that stuff, but that it offends people who come to see Adventure Yard, and makes them think it's not as good--and that if he's going to use language like that, I'm not willing to take him along when we go to the hardware store. It's just not appropriate for school.

The third case, where a child is abusive with language to another child, depends in part on the age of the child. The younger children don't always have an idea of what they're saying. We explain that it is offensive to the other person. For the older children we're really cut-and-dried about it; they cannot do it.

Betty: *Do you ignore any of it?*

Nancy P.: *I ignore when a child does it in anger--for example, when she hammers her thumb. This is legitimate. I swear sometimes too.*

The other side is, we try not to make a real big deal of it either. It's low-key. It's not "You have to get your mouth washed out with soap," or, "You're a terrible person." Just that it doesn't work.

Mae: *Nancy, does that mean that you spend a lot of time talking with the staff?*

Nancy P.: *We came to a consensus about language right from the beginning. There was definite agreement on the kinds of approaches we would use. And this is something we've talked a lot about in group meetings with the children--about presenting things from a positive rather than a negative angle, getting children to understand what it means to be supportive of other people, to be in a safe space--those things.*

Doris: *How do you do it, Nancy? Do you give a lecture?*

Nancy P.: *No. If a child is disrupting the group meeting, we say, "If you can't support the group meeting, you'll have to leave." If he can't do that, then he leaves--with an adult. He can't come back into the meeting until he wants to be back in the meeting, and until he agrees he's going to support it.*

And in general, the children are really honest. If they make an agreement, they'll stick to it. The problem has sometimes been that I've said, "You'll *have to agree, if you're going to go back in the meeting, that there'll be no more kicking and pinching." So as he goes in the door, he says, "O.K., I won't kick and pinch, but I'll jump on people instead." Coming from the positive angle of supporting the group does help to clarify this.*

Betty: *I was just reading Tina Carney's paper,* and she was describing one of the problems as trying to decide what to do when everyone is singing and one child is singing, "Fuck, shit, fuck shit." You would stop that?*

Nancy P.: *We would stop that. Because it's disruptive. It's not supporting the meeting.*

And you know, we're still working on it. The meetings aren't all great. But, in general, I do see a great change in children's behavior.

Betty: *As a result of setting down rules and being willing to be ogres, in Tina's words?*

Nancy P.: *Yes. Really firm, and really clear on what the limits are.*

Defining Terms

Doris: *How do you define the terms? Is it clear? For example, is "Shut up" abusive? Where do you draw the line?*

Betty: *Yes. One of the rules is no name-calling. But what do you do with other unacceptable language that isn't name-calling? Which words can be used and which words can't be used? (I used to fine my own children for words I didn't like, which resulted in a lovely process of figuring out which words can you say without getting to Mommy.)*

Nancy P.: *Oh, we just deal with the big ones. Like if they're sitting at the top of the tree making rhymes about "Shut up," I don't care.*

Mae: *What about "bitch?" I find that personally offensive.*

Molly S.: *So do I. This is one of the reasons I use Belinda (our dog). As soon as I get a lot of "bitch, bitch, bitch," I bring her to school, because she's a bitch. It's a legitimate way to use the word. Once they really understand that this is indeed a very specific thing--all a "bitch" is is a female of the canine species--it slacks off.*

Sometimes much of the bathroom talk and body talk come from the fact that some children really want a body that they can look at; they have questions about sex and sexuality. And Belinda is very cooperative; she lies down, and they can explore her from beginning to end. The whole thing just evaporates when they realize that there is a real part to the body for everything they are using slang terminology for. It takes the punch out of it, so to speak.

Jackie: *When I was having a lot of difficulties at the beginning of the year, I asked the children, "What are some bad words? Tell me some bad words." And they said, "shit, fuck, penis, vagina." A whole bunch of things were all mixed in there.*

Molly S.: *Our culture gets those things mixed up; it isn't only the children who do. We look at human excrement as filth, rather than as a natural process. The children pick up our anxieties about sex, too. It's no wonder they find it exciting and scary all at once.*

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*See Chapter 5.

Racial Words

Mae: *We were talking one day about what we do when we're faced with a conflict of values--like when a child hits back for being called, "nigger," and is benched for hitting. Do we care more about promoting non-violence, or about handling the racial name-calling? Which do we address ourselves to in that situation?*

Jackie: *That happened in my group last year, and I did not bench for it. I felt the child handled it well. I felt the slap he gave the other child was really appropriate, and much better than the times when we say, "Use words," or, "We don't hit," or any of that stuff.*

Mae: *You made a value judgment at that point.*

Jackie: *Yeah.*

Doris: *Charlotte, you've done some really clear thinking about how racism develops in young children. Can you share some of that with us?*

Charlotte: *In younger children--under five, say--I think there's a different dynamic operating than in older children. One of the things I see happening is children's picking up cues from the environment on how comfortable or uncomfortable adults are with the very subtle kinds of things that occur--body language, responses to another child's outburst of name-calling, withdrawal from an individual--maybe because they're fearful about being different.*

Like, I curled my hair today. And the reaction of very young children to this is, "Oh, look at you, dummy. What did you do to your hair?" This kind of name-calling isn't so much a real put-down as an expression of worry--"You're different today. Does that mean that all of you is different? Have you changed? Does that affect me?"

I feel similarly when young children talk about skin color. Usually they don't come out and say, "Oh, look at your skin, it's different." They'll say something like, "Oh, yuck!" or pull away when you try to touch them.

One little girl came to Day Care with very little contact with people of other racial groups, especially blacks. It was nap time, and I went over to put a blanket over her, and there was a real fear reaction--"Dum dum!" and so on. At other times of the day she could relate to me, but now there was this very strong reaction. I realized that I'm really a different kind of individual to her, and she doesn't know what this is all about. So I just said to her, "Yeah, I really am different. I'm someone that you don't know yet, and that's O.K." It was nap time, so I didn't impose myself on her. But I made a mental note of the whole reaction, so that at a future time we could talk about differences.

Mae: *At the later date, when you reopened the discussion, how did you get into it?*

Charlotte: *It was later on that same day, after nap time, and after snack time, and there was clay out on the deck. It was terra cotta clay--I'm picking my moments here! I find that young children have lots of reactions to clay and to brown things--black being bad, and brown things reminding them of feces--and I also noticed a reluctance which this child had about playing with the clay. That's how I got into it. Just talking to her, but not intruding. Talking about the color of the clay--"Yeah, and my skin is brown, too. This is the way I was born." (I thought that was important, because sometimes you'll get a "Gee, what happened to you? Why don't you rub that off?" A little Oriental boy came up to me and said, "Didn't you wash your face today?" And I said, "That's just my color. It doesn't come off.") And we had a chance to look around the table and compare colors, and shapes, and sizes. Putting it in that kind of setting took the sting out of it; it wasn't a heavy trip. I feel that's important when adults discuss these things. If you're uptight about it, that gets across to children as if it's something bad--a big secret. The same as not talking about it.*

Mae: *If it didn't come up, would you do anything?*

Charlotte: *I check out the body language--the amount of distance children keep, their responses to me--and I try to eliminate other factors that might cause it. Maybe it's some other thing altogether, but that'll come up too, in the course of the conversation. Young children aren't always able to express these perceptions; they may not say anything to me, because maybe in the past adults have not addressed this issue at all.*

Doris: *When that child said to you, "Didn't you wash this morning?" how did you de-fuse yourself, deal with your anger? It seems as if you have such ability to de-fuse these things in yourself. How did you get that way?*

Charlotte: *At that point, I really didn't have to de-fuse. I know the child who said it very well, and he's such an open guy, and I love him. He was making an honest observation, and it was no big thing; I could deal with it with a straightforward explanation.*

Part of the way I think I got to this place is by working with disturbed children. You have to be able to talk about whatever comes up, including realities that adults find very painful. That kind of training has really helped. Also, knowing child development, and the kinds of stages children go through.

Kathy: *How do you deal with it when it's an older child who's doing it to hurt somebody?*

Charlotte: *The younger children want to know certain things--is it catching, what is it going to do to me, will it change, will I stay the same? With the older child it's different. The older children are in tune with the larger community; they pick up on things that are said, in context or out of context. They're also into being totally accepted by their peers, no matter what that means. The model that peers set up is probably more powerful than what adults set up. Also, older children are more in tune with what adults do, rather than what adults say you should do. And they know the taboos, and they pick up on the little things that adults let slip. And then they embellish.*

Doris: *You don't assume they're asking questions any more.*

Charlotte: *No. They're not leaving anything out, either. They're very direct. They say what they have to say, and usually it comes out of anger or being hurt.*

Doris: *It's a whole different thing, you're saying.*

Charlotte: *That's my feeling. A lot of times it's a put-down, and sometimes it's testing, to see where you're at. It's a push to make the adult jump.*

Doris: *Do the older children push your buttons, get to you faster than...*

Charlotte: *Yes. They can get to me, because I know that it's a real manipulative thing. And sometimes you can sense when it's really out to hurt. That angers me, because of that dynamic in itself. That's where I'm not as well-protected; I haven't worked that out as well. But I do feel pretty able to share my anger. I have no reservations about saying, in a case of name-calling, "Wait, I'm not buying that. I'm Charlotte. I'm not a doodoo, or dumbhead, or nigger. This is me."*

And then, it would depend on the child. Some children have learned to use certain racial slurs just to trigger a fight, because they love a fight, and they get some attention. Other children maybe do it because they have integrated some feelings that you are less, or bad; in a way, they are using the words appropriately. They know what they are saying. That's different. If I pick up on that, I'll say to them, "Stop. What does that word mean?"

Kathy: *I don't care if he knows what it means. There's one boy that says, "You suck!" all day. I don't care if he knows what it means or not! I don't want him walking down the street with me when he screams that out.*

Charlotte: *If you're on the street, that's different, too.*

Kathy: *I don't want him to do it around me. It's not appropriate. And I don't* *want him to use the word "nigger." I...*

Mae: *Then you stop it.*

Charlotte: *Well, that's my first step. "Hey--stop." And then--say it's a seven-year-old, and we're in a private setting, and there's an interaction between me and the child, and I don't have to try to cope with the whole community while this is going on* (general laughter)*--then I might come back to him, "What does that mean? Do you know? Maybe that's a word I don't know about; can you explain it to me?" Then he really has to think about it, and we can get some dialogue going. "What are some other words you know?"*

A Developmental View

Doris: *Let me insert a question. Which of this is unavoidable developmental behavior--experimentation with language? For example, let's agree that maybe there are some words that across-the-board are forbidden. But then, there are some gray areas with words. With a three-year-old it may be "doodoo, peepee"--something like that. With a six-year-old it may be something else. Some children use them in abundance, and other children just never do.*

Ellen: *I have a couple of examples. I had a group last summer of four- and five-year-olds who spent about a week and a half building "peepee machines." They were very intricate kinds of things--using colored water, tubes, and all that sort of stuff. And they ran from yard to yard pointing to this peepee, and screaming and yelling and having a wonderful time with all this kaka and pee. All the language was related to that. And I didn't do anything about it. And so then--well, summer school ended.* (laughter)

Mae: *I can just hear you saying, "Six more days..."*

Ellen: *One of the children's mothers, whom I know really well, was going crazy with all this pee and stuff. But I guess they worked it through.*

Then I have a couple of children this year who run around the yard yelling "mothersucker." That's what they say. They just yell it, you know, as they run. And I stopped one of them one day, and I said, "I wonder what that means, what you're saying?" And he said, "Mothersucker." And I said, "Yeah, I hear what you're saying, but what does it mean?" And he said, "I don't know."

Liz: *Did you correct his language?* (laughter)

Betty: *He can't say "f." He lisps.*

Ellen: *To me, it just feels like it's experimentation. It's just something they've picked up and they know it's...*

Doris: *That depends. It may be, for that child. But perhaps it could be hurtful for another child, if that child was coming from a place of supersensitivity.*

Ellen: *Well, if they used it against anybody. But they're not; they're just yelling it.*

Mae: *We're not going to say that we're wiping out all experimentation with language, I hope.*

Nancy P.: *No. I'm not saying that. But the older children, past preschool, aren't experimenting with language; they know what they're doing. If they're saying, "fuck, fuck, shit" on top of the tree and all the people are walking by, I am going to stop it. It's not worth it. It's not worth it to me to have parents upset, to have everybody upset. We want people to think that Adventure Yard's a good place.*

Mae: *That bothers me.*

Ellen: *Yeah. It looks like you're playing to the public.*

Mae: *It doesn't feel honest to me. It feels like we're putting on a show for somebody else. I would like to get to a point where we decide--and I don't know if we can--what's developmentally appropriate for children. What do they need to try out and use? Because if we just say they can't use it--so we'll look good--they'll be using it underneath and covering it up. And that doesn't feel honest to me.*

Nancy P.: *Well, except for two things. One is that that __is__ the honest reason they can't say it; it isn't because it's bad or anything. This is necessary social learning for primary-age children--that this language isn't acceptable to other people. And the other is that they can write whatever they want--in their key words, and their language journals.*

Jackie: *What about writing? I always say, "What if your Mom saw this?" Sometimes they say she wouldn't like it.*

Nancy P.: *That's a very good point. If when they write stuff, they're going to want to show it to other people...*

Mae: *Do they then decide they can't write it, or do you have them consider it?*

Jackie: *They consider it and decide. So far, one boy has checked with his Mom, and she said it's O.K.*

Mae: *It seems as if children __can__ begin to sort it out. Like you don't say this in front of your grandmother, and you don't say it in the market, but you can say it in the car on the way home.*

Nancy P.: *I think it's important to be clear with children that there are times and places that are appropriate for different things.*

I think the other thing we were dealing with in Adventure Yard would not be true in a preschool yard, which is that the children had really learned to use that language manipulatively--to get at people. A lot of them weren't experimenting with language. They were misusing it.

Mae: *Yeah. The preschool children often swing on the swing. And with the rhythm of the swing they'll chant "peepee, kaka," up and down and up and down. And I wouldn't stop this because of visitors. I'd feel it would be Doris's job to explain to them.* (laughter)

Stephanie: *Racial naming starts with classification. Classifying is exploring; it's something children are going to do whether you like it or not. Cognitively, children organize and classify all kinds of things--people being one of them. Skin color's a good way to do it, blue eyes, brown eyes, and so on. They do it from eighteen months on. But then, all of a sudden, they're in the primary years, and it's not O.K. to classify any more, because there's a new feeling attached to it.*

Louise: *I make the assumption that racial attitudes are a key aspect of socialization in this culture. By age three, children are clearly into classifying; and by four or five, they not only classify one another according to social classification, but they've also learned the evaluative judgments that go with it. All children are touched by racism, whether they ask about it or not. It is something that happens as a part of socialization, just like whether you're a girl or boy. Within this universal experience, there are developmental stages. Children's cognitive capacity changes; at each level they are going to be dealing differently with what's out there.*

One of the measures of racism is that people who can make more complex distinctions, don't. They make over-generalizations, saying, "All blacks are..." That's what racism does; it reinforces the young child's limited evaluations and prevents the development of more understanding of the categories. So it seems to me we will have to start exploring the kinds of experiences we can provide to help children evaluate and extend what they are already learning. How can we help them use feedback from new experiences to develop a more elaborate classification system?

It isn't simply developmental that the children are messing around with racial slurs. If they were in another culture that was not racist, they *wouldn't be. But the weightiness around it does have to do with their developmental level. It's because it's a combination of developmental level and societal racism that adults need to communicate their feelings, their anger about the slurs--especially with primary-age children. Because it's not a neutral area. If part of it is social learning, then the modeling by adults is important. We don't want to model neutrality.*

Charlotte: *With the younger children, I feel that I want to model a fairly neutral position, so they can start to really look. But older children need to know where you stand.*

Mae: *I think that there are four-year-olds with whom I would begin to deal in terms of how I feel about it. When they've gone through the exploration, I would then make sure they knew exactly how I felt.*

Doris: *O.K. We can say that children can understand, at a certain age, that things are appropriate one place and not another. But the truth is that words like "motherfucker" are not O.K. in school settings in this society. If we make them O.K. in this school setting, by accepting them as experimentation, it must be confusing to a child.*

Stephanie: *The beauty in it is that a child can hear from a teacher, "Yes, it's all right with me; that's O.K. Some words are not O.K., or they're not O.K. with your grandparents." It's an opportunity to find out that different people do have different limits.*

Doris: *But when you have a staff of a dozen people, it's terribly confusing.*

Nancy P.: *That was the main thing we worked on. You don't know how much we've talked about things like this, till we all got agreement and we could all support it. You've got to have consistency among the personnel in a setting.*

Mae: *Over major issues...*

Nancy P.: *Over anything.* (laughter)

Doris: *It appears to me that the preschool teachers have consensus that bathroom talk is O.K. in preschool.*

Betty: *There's a difference. Adults don't use bathroom talk. So if a small child does it, that doesn't bother adults. But as soon as children start using adult bathroom talk or racial names, that's a different thing. That's an issue of power.*

Coming to Terms with the Power Issue

Liz: *It seems to me that I've heard the power theme in a whole lot of the things that have been said. Like some of the things you said, Nancy.*

Nancy P.: *Oh, for sure. There's no question about that.*

Liz: *Some children are really getting a nice power trip out of it.*

Nancy P.: *Oh, I thought you meant adult power trip. Because, as I was saying, we definitely viewed ourselves as adults at the beginning of the year. There was no question that we were in charge of the yard and we needed to let children know that we were.*

Liz: *And that immediately solves certain power issues.*

Nancy P.: *That's right. I am more powerful than Richard; that is true.*

Stephanie: *And you make that clear.*

Nancy P.: *Yeah.*

Stephanie: *But the child is going to win, any way you cut it--because he needs to win. So behind your back, after you've benched him...*

Mae: *You call that winning?*

Liz: *It looks as if this is one of the areas where we have disagreement. Like Stephanie sees the child sitting on the bench muttering to himself as an O.K. thing for him. And you evidently don't feel O.K. about it.*

Going On to Build Understanding

Doris: *I think that the win would be that the children would get together among themselves, at that age.*

Nancy P.: *And they do. That's why we have those meetings in the afternoon. Like the first week of school, I really got into it with Eddie. And at the meeting that afternoon, the children discussed whether I should have done that with him. I gave my side, Eddie gave his side, and it was a time for those power lines to be looked at--for the children to get together and say, "It's not fair." But really what has happened, whenever we have meetings about it, is that they really are supporting those limits. They were ready for them--they really were.*

Liz: *You also have a safe place where these things can be examined.*

Nancy P.: *That's right.*

Louise: *It isn't simply a question of what we do when abusive language is used. I'm very concerned that we get beyond the level of just coping with it when it happens.*

Doris: *Would you call that clean-up?*

Louise: *Yeah, clean-up curriculum.* (laughter)

It seems to me that in dealing with racial slurs we need a larger context, which Charlotte was beginning to get at. I want to see us have curriculum ongoing, where we are developing children's understanding of the whole issue, their awareness of their own and others' ethnic identities. If we have other things we are doing all the time, then in a specific situation, whether it's coming from anxiety or anger, I don't feel uncomfortable telling a six- or seven- or eight-year-old, "Stop, you may not use that."

Doris: *I think what Betty said applies. Adult bathroom talk and racial slurs are much more threatening--more dangerous--than little children's experimentation with that other stuff. And therefore, we have to deal with it differently--by making it safe, but also by allowing the children to share.*

Nancy P.: *It's a paradox. Primary-age children need our limit-setting in order to experiment safely. They can truly experiment only if the limits on behavior are clear. Otherwise, they are constantly trying to define the limits, rather than really finding out what works in a social setting.*

Stephanie: *Our feeling was, in order to make this a place where we could survive, and not get mad and then transfer all these mad feelings to the children, we would simply step in straight, with adult-imposed rules. There is no name-calling. There is no teasing. Pretty soon, I'm sure it will come up, but probably not until the children bring it up by saying, "We don't think it's fair." Then we'll talk about it and go from there.*

Mae: *Were there any alternatives talked about?*

Stephanie: *No. There were no alternatives.*

Mae: *No, I mean in the sense that if somebody was teasing, there could be alternative ways of expressing feelings. What do you do with the feelings when you stop the language?*

Nancy P.: *Children aren't just "punished." There's always a time when they get to talk about it--talk about the reason for the--we call it benching. ("Just like public school," Manny said.) They sit and think about what was going* *on, and then they talk with an adult who was at the scene of whatever happened. There is always that opportunity for the child to express himself; and we try to have the children express their feelings to each other, as Molly has said.*

And the thing is, they're taking a lot more responsibility now. They set up activities in the morning; they have study groups in the afternoon; they initiate the discussions for our afternoon meetings. They are taking a lot more responsibility for the yard than they were before.

I think the most important thing we do, along with setting clear limits, is to be up-front about the mistakes we, as adults, make. I said, "Oh, shut up!" to a child the other day, and he looked at me in surprise and said, "You can't say that." And I said, "You're right, I can't." I apologized, and we talked about how angry I was feeling. He apologized, too.

If the children can't use words to put people down, neither can I. It's in discussing our common problems that we build respect for each other.

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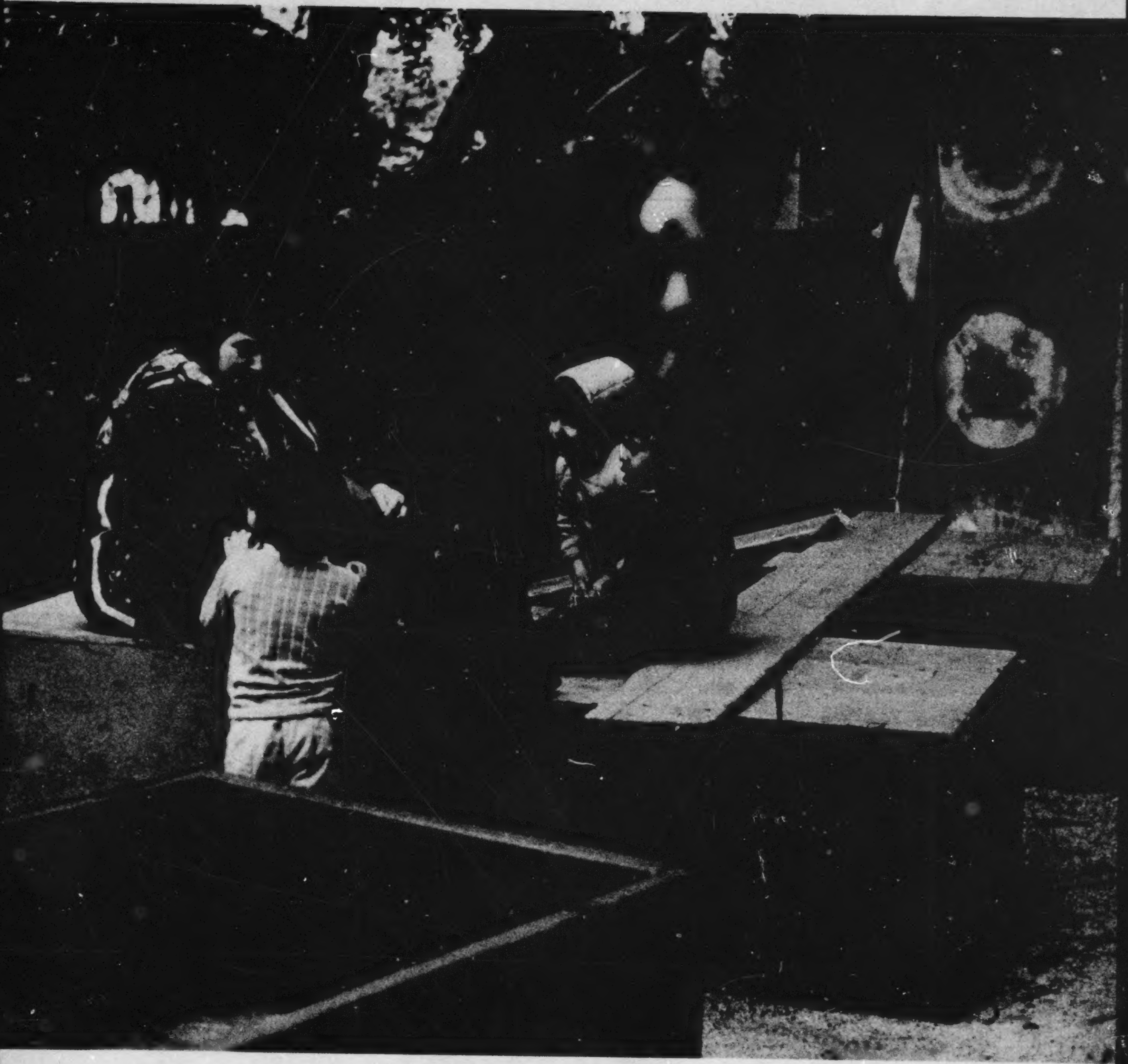

8. The Invisible Child: Challenge to Teachers' Attentiveness

Bunny Rabiroff and Elizabeth Prescott

As a preschool teacher, it has seemed to me* that the first problem in teaching young children in open settings is this: you have a teacher, a staff of adults, and a group of children. If you have given any choices or latitude about where children may be, if you don't have them sitting at tables all the time, or all either indoors or outdoors, then one of the things that appears to happen is that some children "get lost."

Open-structure settings offer variety and richness of choice, and flexibility of pace and focus. Because not all children do the same thing at the same time, or even at different times, it is not necessary to compare children on a single set of expectations. Motivation comes from the individual's own interests. The risk in such settings lies in the possibility that some children will fall through the cracks, will remain unnoticed by everyone, will receive neither challenges nor rewards. As we have become acquainted with some children in this plight, we have called them "invisible." The invisible child is one who has made no impact on us; we can remember little or nothing about him or her.

Invisible Children

In one of our studies of day care, we observed 84 children for a large part of their waking day in day care centers (Prescott, et al., 1975). There were many things that we learned from this study, but one thing that impressed our staff as having great implications for the well-being of children was a realization that while some children managed very well and seemed to thrive in even the most unpromising settings, there were other children who seemed to receive constant negative input, and others to whom no one seemed to pay any attention at all. Some of these children received no more than six or seven inputs from a teacher--amounting to about two minutes of adult attention--during the entire day that we observed. It seems to us that an important, and up until now a relatively neglected, emphasis in all programs for young children should be a sustained attempt to reach out to those children who evoke a negative response and to those who seem to be invisible.

A student teacher described her observations of an invisible child:

> *I chose to observe Greg this semester because I realized that, of all the children in the group, he was the one of whose existence I was least aware. As I have tried to pay attention, this is the picture that emerges:*
>
> *Most often, when things are going on, he is on the outskirts, wandering or just sitting. The activities which seem to give him the most satisfaction are climbing--on the shelves, piano, lockers, or heater indoors (rarely on the jungle gym) and on the tree outdoors--and having books read to him. He may approach a teacher with an armload of books and ask her to read. At times he appears to use a book as a security object, holding on to one while doing or watching other things. When reading is denied he is likely to turn to climbing; when he is stopped from climbing, he goes for the books.*
>
> *With other children, Greg is usually on the edge of a group rather than a participator. Frequently his attempts to get attention from others take the form of teasing, hitting, and chasing, which does bring attention of a sort, usually from teachers as well as children. Sometimes he taunts teachers, hits them, or runs, daring them to chase him, out-of-bounds.*
>
> *A six-year-old neighbor, asked if he plays with Greg, replied, "Greg? He never plays. He just sits, or he just bothers."*

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*Bunny Rabiroff

Strategies for Identifying Invisible Children

Working with a teaching staff, we began to wrestle with the question of keeping track of children. We tried out some of the traditional ways in which preschool teachers are taught to keep track of children. For the most part, we found these approaches too haphazard and not really helpful:

Anecdotal Records. Students are traditionally taught that the recording of important anecdotes is a valuable way to remember important things about a child. We found that the anecdotal method produces records which are unsystematic and sporadic; children who are being ignored don't get anecdotal records written about them. Also, in retrospect, it is often hard to tell if the record is more descriptive of the child or of the adult who has written it.

Sociograms. Because we perceived that invisible children weren't making friends, we tried making observations of all the children and charting friendship patterns--who was interacting with whom. This approach proved time-consuming. It told us something about interaction patterns, but nothing about how a child interacts.

Records of Positive and Negative Contacts. It was our assumption that invisible children's contacts with others tended to be both infrequent and, when they happened, negative. We therefore tried to get all staff members to tally, at the end of the morning, all children with whom they had had significant positive or negative contacts. This approach was somewhat useful, but it required much nagging to get anything approaching a complete record and led to endless arguments about the criteria for a positive or negative contact.

Skill Inventory. We wondered if invisible children were less skillful than others and therefore not getting recognition for things they did. However, we found that a check list with such items as "knows colors" or "can cut with scissors" did not tell us how a child did these things or whether he was interested in doing them. And such a check list seemed to focus attention on who was more skillful, knew more, etc., a stance which we saw as unhelpful both to teachers and to parents.

On the other hand, we did develop some approaches which we found useful, and which seemed to merit further use and development:

Visibility Ratings. At weekly staff meetings each staff member was asked to write down the names of all the children in the group without attempting to use any kind of predetermined order or memory scheme. When people had written down as many names as they could remember, without stopping for long periods of time to think, they were asked to draw a line below the last name on their lists. The children missing from their lists were then added below the line during the subsequent process of ranking all the children on everyone's lists. It became apparent that there were some children who were never forgotten, while others invariably fell at or near the bottom of everyone's lists, and some that tended to be forgotten completely. The children who were invisible on the lists also tended to be children who were being overlooked in the group.

Yard Scan. As an alternative to anecdotal records and sociometric charts, we invented a yard scan which could be used systematically twice (or more) a morning. It recorded each activity being used, what every child was doing, and with whom. We found that this approach produced sociometric data more easily than our previous charting of friendship patterns. It was simple, easy to use, and served to locate "lost" children twice each morning.

Detailed Observation. We tried two approaches here, both of which gave rich data. Both involved following one child for a period of time.

One method was videotaping a child's behavior. Staff or students could then look at the tapes together as a group, and discuss them. This we found useful both in highlighting information about specific children and in helping students identify behaviors which had been previously unclear to them.

The second approach was the use of our observation schedule from the *Day Care Environmental Inventory* (Prescott, et al., 1975). This was a detailed observation scheme to keep track of and categorize a child's experience. We have since found it very productive to teach students how to use this code. It is especially useful in helping people look at a child in new ways when they are stuck and cannot generate alternative approaches. The code also shows, dramatically, the times that a child makes approaches which are ignored or rejected. Like the sociogram, this approach is time-consuming, but it gives more information--and the person who is coding can see what is happening for the child while she is doing so.

Card Sort. In order to stimulate staff members to think about individual children, we developed a card sort on characteristics of style and temperament. Each of the eighteen items shown below was typed on a separate card. Focusing on one child, the staff group was asked to sort the cards according to their ability to answer each question, so that two piles grew: "Know" and "Don't Know." Those items to which staff members felt they knew the answers were further sorted, after discussion, by the extent to which staff agreed in their characterization of the child. For example, if everyone answered "Yes" to the question, "Is s/he curious?" and could give specific examples, we felt they shared a clearer picture of this child than of the child about whom staff members, when asked, "What is s/he afraid of?" responded in a variety of ways (e.g., "Nothing," "Trying new things," "Slugs and spiders"). The physical sorting of cards made very visible the differences in staff awareness of different children. Some children had no cards in the "Don't Know" pile, while, for a few children, the "Don't Know" pile towered over the "Know" pile.

HOW TO THINK BEFORE YOU ACT

A Developmental Card Sort

1 Does s/he enjoy large muscle activities?
2 Does s/he show precision in handling small muscle activities?
3 When is this child tense, relaxed, at ease?
4 How is this child's overall health?
5 How does this child operate in play with other children?
6 Does s/he use language to take care of her/his needs?
7 How does s/he handle conflicts with other children?
8 In what ways does s/he find adults useful?
9 Does s/he do interesting things with materials?
10 Is s/he curious?
11 Does s/he distract easily?
12 Can this child reason when upset?
13 In what ways does s/he make believe?
14 What sort of things does s/he think are funny?
15 What things make this child angry?
16 What is s/he afraid of?
17 What does s/he like and how does s/he show it?
18 What motivates this child? What does s/he care about most?

(Rabiroff and Prescott, 1975)

Staff members found the act of sorting cards to be easy and enjoyable, and it provoked a great deal of thought and discussion. It appears that the card sort can incorporate some of the things we had hoped to accomplish with our now-discarded skill inventory.

The dialogue with students which grew out of our work with these approaches was full of surprises. On one hand, they took more initiative than we expected in suggesting and trying out a variety of tools. On the other hand, they often resisted any approaches which would force them to change their perception of themselves. Here are some examples:

- Students argued vehemently about *why* certain children kept turning up at the bottom of the visibility ratings and they kept predicting a change (which seldom occurred). They were much less interested in discussing what they wanted to *do* about an invisible child. Often the discussion implied that the child was at fault for being invisible.
- We were also aware that students seemed to avoid the parents of invisible children. It was as if the parent had also become invisible. If we made some progress, and empathy for the child began to emerge, then the blame seemed to shift to the parent.
- They also argued that other students were consistently forgetting the same children, "but *I* don't do that." Evidence showed that, in fact, they were consistent forgetters.
- There were some children that students really resisted talking about. They would get into a warm, lively discussion about a visible child but would become lethargic, go for coffee, or fiddle with papers when an invisible child was being discussed.

Students' tuning-out response was not, we discovered, unique to inexperienced students. One summer I* was walking up Shady Lane, and I noticed a child who had been in my yard the semester before. He was walking back and forth, talking to himself, not connecting to anything. After I had said hello, it occurred to me that he was at loose ends, and I wondered what we were neglecting. And so I said to him, "I've got something to do," and I sat down on a bench to watch him. I was waiting to see whether he would get to the point at which he couldn't stand being lost and would make some connection back to a teacher and children, or whether an adult would come looking. I found it a little deplorable that no one did anything for forty minutes. The child amused himself in the dullest kinds of ways--picking up pebbles, wandering around in an unfocused manner. He made a few casual overtures to children. From time to time he walked peripherally around some of the activities in the yard, but no one noticed him.

When I described my observation to the head teacher, I got instant hostility in response. This experience taught me something which has been reinforced ever since--that teachers in all programs display great indignation when it is suggested that they could overlook a child's significant need.

I had previously assumed that just noticing that a child is being ignored would change a teacher's behavior. If you, as a teacher, are worried that a child is regularly lost, would you continue to miss him if it was brought to your attention? But we have learned that just talking doesn't help a child become more visible. People begin to yawn and fidget; they sit there with a glazed look; and nothing happens.

It has become clear that a more systematic and/or dramatic approach is necessary. We feel that there is an emotional transformation that needs to occur before a student can really accept the personal responsibility that goes with the structure and philosophy of an open setting. Experienced teachers, who believe they have accepted this responsibility, are sometimes unable to face the fact that there are gaps in their attention to children. We have seen much resistance--and some breakthroughs.

Labeling, Blaming, and Taking Responsibility

We have serious concerns about labeling children. Labels are often used to justify washing our hands of a problem: since this child *is* "hyperactive" or "slow," there's nothing I, as a classroom teacher, can do about it except put him in the slow group, or, even better, send him to a special class. We propose that the idea of invisibility be used in a different way--not as yet another label for children, but, rather, to point out a *gap in teachers' perceptions*, which is potentially harmful for children *and* can be remedied.

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*Bunny Rabiroff

Invisibility is an indication that the staff, not the child, has a problem. It is the adults who are making this child invisible, because they find him unrewarding to be with. It is up to the staff to devise ways of creating some successes for themselves with the child, and to begin to build on these in establishing a positive relationship.

The teaching staff has responsibility for the child in school. There is no point in blaming the child--or his family--for his behavior. Until the staff has learned to relate positively to the child, they are in no position to deal positively with his parents Once a good relationship has begun, then a teacher can share her successes with the parents and build any questions and concerns on this base. Our task as teachers is to support parents in understanding and appreciating their children, not to make *them* feel inadequate because *we* feel inadequate in dealing with a child.

The Difficulties of Intervention

If children are getting lost, we're not doing our job--which, as we conceive it, involves being aware of every child as an individual and making provision for his interests and needs. When we first began making visibility ratings, we tried assigning each of the children at the bottom of the list to a particular staff member, with the idea of having a responsible, caring adult regularly available to the child. But we found that we couldn't get any adult to sustain responsibility for such a child for more than twenty minutes. At first we thought it was just students who couldn't, but experienced teachers reacted the same way. If someone else asked for help, the teacher inevitably moved away from her assigned child to provide it; and once he was left, the child retreated so swiftly that the attention which had been given was lost time.

It gradually became clear to us that: 1) there are children who remain consistently invisible; 2) making people aware of this fact--even assigning them to pay attention--doesn't work, because the child's behavior is so non-rewarding to adults; and 3) because it proved impossible to do any turning around of the child in that way, it was clear that we simply didn't know enough about the child. We needed to look before acting further.

Our detailed observations using the coding scheme provided some interesting information. The behavior of these children was characterized by a lot of thrusts (efforts to initiate interaction, to get something started), receipt of an enormous amount of low-grade rejection (mostly being ignored), and virtually no integrative (absorbed, sustained) play. This pattern suggested a low trust level, non-existent social skills, and a great desire for social response.

"Getting Stuck in Autonomy"

Looking at this pattern in terms of Erikson's developmental stages, we found ourselves describing such children as "stuck in autonomy." That is, the child hasn't really made it through the stage--normally accomplished in the second year of life--of *autonomy vs. shame or doubt*. The child who is successfully achieving autonomy repeatedly says, by his actions and words, "This is me. I'm going to do this. I'm not going to do this." In response, he gets encouragement to "stand on his own feet," together with firm reassurance, which is needed to "protect him against the potential anarchy of his as yet untrained sense of discrimination" (Erikson, 1950, p. 223). The balance is such that he comes out with a feeling that he can make an impact on the world.

The child who gets "stuck" in this stage experiences insufficient success in asserting himself. When the question of who's going to make the choices arises, adult standards become so dominant that the child never really experiences a sense of power. The willful behavior by which he is trying to establish himself as an autonomous person is met by shaming, instead of encouragement.

> *Shame is early expressed in an impulse to bury one's face, or to sink, right then and there, into the ground. But this, I think, is essentially rage turned against the self. He who is ashamed would like to force the world not to look at him...Instead he must wish for his own invisibility.* (Erikson, 1950, p. 223)

The invisible children we have observed seem to vacillate between wishing for their own invisibility and making continuing efforts to assert themselves. Their problem is that they have no clear sense of how to express themselves in any positive way. They are thwarted every time they try. If they say, "I'm going to...," they often get thwarted; if they say, "I'm not going to...," they get ignored.

A child stuck in autonomy needs to be put in the position of having genuine choices. Adult imagination is needed to provide them--to create choices so that *either* choice will bring success for the child.

This conceptual framework grew out of the sort of process in which, we suspect, all useful theories are built: 1) a lot of concrete experience; 2) looking for patterns in order to make sense out of that experience; 3) development of hunches; 4) testing those hunches; 5) finding that other people have had related hunches and may have formalized them into theory; and 6) bringing it all together in a formulation of one's own, which suggests possible courses of action. We did not rediscover Erikson's discussion of autonomy, shame, and invisibility until we were well along in our own data-collecting process. When we did, it helped the pieces fit together.

Strategies for Intervention

When you identify individual children's needs and make an effort to respond to them, most children will respond in kind to your effort. Once given support and attention, they are freed to express their needs and then free to move into program activities. Not much discretion is needed in giving support; the adult can make offers, and the child can accept or reject them; she can state that she doesn't want to wear an apron, or that she wants *that* paint. She just needs help in getting started and in having some success.

Children who have become invisible are already very distrustful. It is hard for them to take the risk of using materials or approaching people. Their need for reactions from other people is very strong, but they don't know good ways of getting positive reactions. We watched one morning while a teacher was supervising an activity of making "guitars" from rubber bands stretched across boxes. Jon came along and started cutting up rubber bands, to annoy the teacher. Then he ran, and she chased him. This went on for half an hour; it was the best attention he'd gotten in a long time. From a child's point of view, attention for negative behavior is much better than no attention at all.

Had the teacher realized what was going on for this child and been imaginative about it, she might have been able to capitalize on his interest in cutting in other ways and give him *positive* response. We saw another child begin jumping on the tables, with a following of other children--his first following. The teacher nipped it in the bud--"We don't jump on tables"--instead of moving in to support him by creating an obstacle course, for example, on which the activity could continue.

If you, the adult, try to move in and help, and do it without the clearly built-in element of choice, the child will experience you as yet another person trying to control him, and he's had his fill of that. So he resists. The sturdiest response is simply No. Other responses include failing to pay attention, walking or running away, or acquiescing to your suggestion but continuing the activity only as long as you watch. You're unlikely to watch long, because this isn't a very rewarding child to watch. So then the child leaves, or is left, saying to himself, "See, she really wasn't interested. There's another reason not to trust 'em."

To intervene effectively you need to be experienced with children; you need to ask good questions, give good choices, and be selfish when faced with other demands, in order to maintain your focus on this child. Adults who try to intervene without knowing clearly what to do don't get reinforced by the child's response, and they quickly just melt away, leaving the child isolated once more. Having figured this out, what we did next was to experiment with an approach to intervention which was designed to give a child choice--and through this, the experience of power and autonomy.

Robert

The two of us observed independently in one of the Pacific Oaks yards. We both identified the same child, Robert, going-on-four, as invisible. My* approach then was to explain to the teaching staff, "I'll be here three times a week for an hour. I want just to talk to Robert and not be available to anyone else."

I found Robert playing in the big sandbox by himself. He had three or four medium-size trucks, into which he was loading sand, and he was talking to himself. His words weren't understandable to me. I sat on a log by the sandbox. Robert glanced at me and continued his activity. I sat for a couple of minutes, watching, getting a feel of the environment. There were children calling to each other and to adults, adults providing input to children--a lot of adults.

Me: *You sure got a lot of teachers in this yard.*
R.: *I don't want to talk to you.*
Me: *O.K. I'll just sit here.*

Two minutes passed. By accident rather than plan, my response had given Robert control. Most people didn't obey him. So he chose to reward me by continuing the conversation:

R.: *There are only two teachers.*
Me: *Do you know their names?* (This gave him a choice.)
R.: *There's just Meg and Mark.*
Me: *Oh. I'm a teacher. Would you like to know my name?*
R.: *No.*
Me: *Your name's Robert, isn't it?*
R.: *How do you know?*
Me: *Your teacher told me.*
R.: *What's yours?*
Me: *My name's Bunny.*
R.: *Then why don't you get in that cage?*
Me: *Well, there's two kinds of bunnies--the people kind, and the rabbit kind. I'm the people kind. But I can wiggle my nose.*
R.: *No, you can't.*
Me: *Do you want to see me?*
R.: *Yes.*

I did, and he almost smiled. Then he realized the length of the conversation he'd been sucked into, and he got up and left. I got up and started walking after him. He didn't settle down again for fifteen minutes; he just kept moving. Nothing else eventful happened during the rest of the hour. He did go back to the sand again, and I sat there with him, but we had no conversation.

On succeeding days, I kept coming back. The above conversation was the most notable event of the first week, and it was nine days before I began to feel a change in him. He became aware of my following him, and he tended to hurry less. At first he looked defiant when he saw me, but as time went on, his reaction was more a nonverbal "Oh, you're here." He didn't try to get rid of me again.

One day he had made contact with Taro, a non-English-speaking child and, next to Robert, the least visible child in the group. With Robert in the lead (invisible children typically take the lead when they manage to make contact with another child), they were climbing into the tree house and sliding down the pole. Robert was trying to make conversation, these attempts followed by his long, drawn-out laugh. He'd wait for a response, getting only a smile from Taro. Then he'd say, "Let's do it again."

Meg, the head teacher in the group, approached. She missed the fact that Robert was having some social success and, knowing that she hadn't been paying attention to Robert and should, she invited Robert and Taro to join the group of children making blueberry muffins. "There's room for you. Would you like to do it?" Robert said, "No," and slid down the pole. Taro nodded yes. He couldn't come down the pole because Robert was there, so he started down the ladder. Robert, who was faster, and whose behavior had taken on a frenetic quality since Meg's invitation, ran to the ladder and started to climb up. Meg said, "Robert, Taro is coming down." Robert rushed to the sand slope and lay down in fetal position, his hands covering his head. Meg took Taro to the muffin-makers. Then, realizing that she had inadvertently taken away Robert's playmate and completely done him in, she came back to Robert. He had gotten up and was shuffling dirt and mumbling; all of him was in motion. She squatted down, below him on the slope, and reached out to him affectionately. He jerked away. His verbal response was a complete non-sequitur. He wasn't coping at all.

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*Bunny Rabiroff

(It's typical, with Robert, that adults often fail to understand his words because the things he's doing with his body are so distracting. His words probably are his way of coping with anxiety, but it's almost impossible to pay attention to them.)

I kept following him. By the second week he started connecting with things a bit--for example, playing in an involved way with small blocks on a table for ten to fifteen minutes. His play was more parallel than social, but he didn't leave when someone said something to him, or when they left. He played standing up; he didn't sit down. It felt to me like an autonomous act, as if he had said to himself, "I'm going to try..." And it felt successful, though I don't recall anyone's reinforcing him for it.

It was typical of Robert to remain isolated--on the periphery of events--and up high. His best interaction during this period happened up high, in the tree house, toward the end of the first three weeks. He had a long piece of green yarn, which he was dropping through a crack in the tree house, then pulling it up, all the while talking to himself. Nearby, down by the large cable-spool structure, was Danny, wearing a police hat and pretend-squirting with a short length of hose. Robert was watching him intently. I took a chance and said to Danny, "You putting out a fire or something?" Danny replied, "Yeah, I be's the fireman." I looked up. Robert was still watching. I said, "Usually there are lots of firemen at a fire. There are hats in that box. If you wanted to help him put out the fire, you could. Could even get a hat."

Robert looked. Then he came down, got a hat, and started using his piece of yarn as a hose. He said to Danny, "That tree's on fire." They both climbed up into the tree house. Danny found the hose awkward to climb with and left it below. He said to Robert, "My hose is out of water." Robert replied, "This one will put out the fire." Danny slid down the pole and stood under the end of the green yarn; he chuckled and said, "You're getting me all wet." He began pulling on the yarn. Robert pulled back, and both were laughing. This whole episode went on for some fifteen minutes, ended by juice time.

This was the first real social connection I saw Robert make. He needed, and got, help in making it. In getting this interaction started, it was clear to me that Danny was happy and that he was unlikely to reject another child. I needed to give Robert a strategy for getting into the play. Left to his own devices, Robert tended to make irrelevant remarks or to laugh hysterically. But Robert understood language, and so did Danny. So if I said to Robert, "Do you think Danny needs help with the fire hose?" that gave Robert some words. He could try asking, "Do you need help?" or he could take the chance, with me right there, of just picking up a fire hose. If Danny had objected, "*I'm* doing it!" I could have said, "Oh, Robert, we should have asked Danny first." I was there to save him if he had needed saving. I was also there to give him an idea of what an appropriate sentence was in that situation. These were the transitional arts in which he had had no experience.

It became particularly apparent when we videotaped Robert that he was a cognitively competent child, with a good command of language and good play ideas. His difficulty was that he'd announce his play ideas in the middle of the air, and they didn't get picked up. He had no success with Kenny, the ringleader of a group of boys actively engaged in fantasy play. One day, Robert came up to Kenny, who was wearing a cape and a cowboy hat, and said to him, "I have a shark." Kenny ignored him, effectively cutting off further attempts.

Now, when I looked at Kenny and I knew the big powerful thing he was into, I knew that it was going to be very hard for Robert to make a successful connection with him. Kenny didn't need Robert. But there were a couple of mild-mannered children in the group who were out looking for friends too. They were wandering by Robert and me, and they were looking for ways to make connections. So I tried to look for a connective line, to get things started. This is what Meg was trying to do with Robert and Taro. But Taro chose to make muffins and Robert chose not to, and she was stuck. What happened, in fact, was that Robert first said No, and then she asked Taro and Taro said Yes. I probably would have done something different. I might have said, "We're making blueberry muffins; would you both like to?" When Robert said No, and *before* Taro said Yes, I would have tried for another connection. Probably I would have tried, "Would you two guys like to go with me to the kitchen?" In other words, I would have tried to set up something with just them, rather than bringing them into an already existing group. I would have hunted for another option, or I would have inquired, "Do you not like blueberries?"--something to not lose the chance to snare them while they were together. I would have made a point of offering a choice--another choice--and I would never have left Robert. What happened was that Taro ended up taking precedence over Robert in the rundown of choices. Robert would have still had me, even if he had opted not for Taro and not for muffins.

After sharing all my experiences with the teaching staff, I stopped my regular visits and it was their turn to follow through. Some good things happened--especially with the head teacher--and some mistakes. Male staff members made more mistakes than female staff; in their efforts to make a connection, they tended to become the controllers rather than enabling Robert to be in control. For example:

> Robert: *I'm Batman.*
> Male teacher: *Good, we'll fly you.*

"Flying" Robert by lifting him in the air made a connection with him by making him dependent on the adult. It also removed him from interaction with other children.

One day, a student teacher set up a marble-roll raceway. It was a long garden hose doubled over to form a kind of slot in the middle, and it was draped over a wall and some hills so it went up and down, a little bit like a slot-car racetrack. Children were putting marbles on it and watching them roll down. The child most involved in this activity was Robert, with his Superman cape on. He was enchanted with the movement of the marble. He had two boys with him, and instead of backing out, he was really being in charge of how it worked. Then two little girls came and stood watching. The teacher said, "Would you like to try it?" They got a marble and put it in the valley of the hose, and of course it didn't move; it just stayed there. Robert came over, picked up the marble, and said, "Here, I'll show you how to do it."

Changing the Environment to Help Invisible Children Succeed

The stage of autonomy, where invisible children have gotten stuck, is concerned with law and order. The child is working to find ground he can stand on--a place of his own, where he can assert himself and where he knows he will be defended against invasion. Until he gains this clear sense of a place that is predictably his, he is not ready to move out and start negotiating with peers. Think of the two-year-old, for whom a very common pattern of playground behavior is to pour sand by himself for awhile, then to make advances to a neighbor, perhaps by poking or throwing sand, and then to retreat hastily and clutch Mommy. To work through this stage, the child needs support and clear limits. "Mommy's right here." "This is your shovel. That's Jody's shovel." "Hand the cup to Jody. Don't throw the cup." Clarity of boundaries and consistent adult support give the child a safe, predictable base from which to test new behaviors and to learn to interact effectively with other children.

The open setting of Robert's nursery school was based on the unexamined assumption that its three- and four-year-olds had already worked through this stage, and were able to take responsibility for much of their own social behavior. The play that most attracted Robert was dramatic and powerful in content (Batman, Superman), carried on by an active group of boys usually led by Kenny. Kenny had charisma and power, and Robert wanted to be with him, but, lacking social skills, Robert hardly ever succeeded. Most of his efforts at moving out toward others in this context met with failure.

When the staff realized this, they were able to make some changes in the environment so that it would work better for Robert (and some other children as well). Detailed observations revealed that Robert had a lot of interest in mechanical things and how they worked--the marble roll, for example, as well as more common construction activities like Legos and Tinker Toys. Robert could function well with these cognitively complex activities with their own built-in structure, provided he was assured of adult support and protection. He could even tune in to others' needs, if he was in a position of control--bigger, stronger, more knowledgeable. To continue to acquire social skills in the future, he needs adults who will model strategies by which he can succeed in making social contacts and who will support him when he takes the risk of doing so. He would probably be more secure in a group where most of the children are younger than he.

Earlier, in describing the incident with Robert, Taro, and the muffins, I said, "I would never have left Robert...Robert would have still had me, even if he had opted not for Taro and not for muffins." In response to this description I've been asked, "Why would Robert get your time and not Taro? Don't we owe this sort of attention to every child?"

My answer is No, not really. The environment as set up will take care of most children's needs most of the time. That frees me, the teacher, to be on the lookout for the few whose needs are not being met and to help them find alternatives. Some children *need* individual time. If I don't have enough regular staff to make this possible, I can use volunteers. If the child needs *my* time, I ask the volunteer, "Can you handle this activity?" in order to try to free myself for fifteen to thirty minutes. If I can give a child fifteen to thirty minutes of quality time, even if only for three days a week, then it's going to make an impact. While Robert needed *skilled* intervention, some children will begin to thrive with sustained attention from *any* warm adult. In such cases, a volunteer can well be assigned to a particular child, with some explanation of that child's needs.

If I have no access to volunteers, I can try to structure the environment to be self-sustaining for awhile, to free me to work with one child. This is harder; but some children take less sustained effort than others. Evelyn, for example, rode to school in a carpool of active boys, and at school she kept hanging around them. She didn't know anyone else, but it was clear that she wasn't assertive enough to make it with the boys. One day, when several of them were absent, she happened to end up at a table with several other non-assertive children. For the first time, we saw her taking an authoritative role. It proved fairly easy to create some leadership roles for her and to support her in carrying them out. One morning, the teacher put Evelyn in charge of pushing the tire swing and said, when another child came along and wanted to swing, "You'll have to ask Evelyn. Evelyn is in charge." Evelyn rapidly became more visible in the group. Like Robert, what she had needed was a chance to take social initiative with children whom she experienced as non-threatening.

Learning to Care...and Why

What characteristics guarantee that a child will be noticed and responded to by adults? Children who take the initiative in integrative play, especially in social play, make teachers feel particularly good; these children are facilitators for and illustrations of what is supposed to be happening in the setting. Children who need help, and appreciate it when they get it, also make teachers feel successful. Children who actively disrupt the program get attention because they rise to the surface at once; the staff starts problem-solving because these are problems they have a tangible need to solve. Invisible children, on the other hand, can be ignored because they don't disrupt the setting. Children who repeatedly refuse adults' invitations to do interesting things will effectively extinguish adults' invitational behavior; none of us likes to be snubbed.

Teachers usually like children who make them feel good, who facilitate the program. They may or may not like the children who cause them problems. But, as a rule, they neither like nor dislike invisible children because they don't notice they're there. A child like Robert makes you, the teacher, feel insignificant; it's easiest to cope by shutting him out of your consciousness.

To begin to make effective contact with an invisible child, you have to find something to like about him. Once you like someone, you can teach him. At the beginning, it is often hard to find a basis on which to relate with mutual pleasure. Invisible children's main source of power lies in the rarity of their response, which makes any real response particularly reinforcing for the adult who is trying to make a connection. Each of us who was in contact with Robert had a particular encounter that really grabbed us. For Bunny, it was his proposal to put her in the cage. He wasn't joking or sharing humor; he was looking for a good put-down for this pushy adult. But she experienced it as humorous and was tickled by it. For Liz, it was his competence with the marble-roll raceway; in this activity, Robert really impressed her.

For Doug, the practicum student and camera expert who did our videotaping, there was a special event. One day in the yard, when Robert got hurt and no teacher was immediately available, Doug put his camera down and helped Robert. This help apparently established him in Robert's feelings as an important, caretaking person, because several weeks later, when Doug was sitting at the gate, Robert suddenly kissed him on the cheek--a most unusual mark of affection.

You, the adult, have to survive the first stage of non-response and move toward mutuality and trust. There are several bases on which a mutual relationship can eventually be established, including humor, empathy, loyalty, shared curiosity, and appreciation of competence. But if you just do what comes naturally, you'll pay attention to the rewarding children and ignore the Roberts. Good intentions are not enough. You have to stop doing what comes naturally. You need to look both at yourself and your reactions, and at this child and what he needs.

While Robert still has a long way to go, he is less invisible than he used to be. We're not sure Robert will ever be a conventional child; we're not trying to make him one. In helping him to develop more social skills, it isn't our aim to make him a conformist. What we are trying to do is to give him the power to do whatever he wants to do--to make an impact on his world, to be able to exert genuine choice. This is our goal for all children.

There are many Roberts in our schools and day care centers who are slowly and effectively digging themselves deeper into holes of non-existence. The risk of invisibility is not one we can afford to take. These children are not having impact on their surroundings; they are not fulfilling their potential. If an individual is boxed in, with no effective power and no self-esteem, sooner or later that frustration will erupt. For an extreme example, there is considerable evidence that Lee Harvey Oswald was an invisible child, who grew up with a desperate need to be noticed and eventually took desperate steps to achieve that goal. The earlier the intervention, the greater the likelihood of turning the child around. We want to help teachers look at the child with fresh eyes and take active responsibility for helping him or her to become fully visible.

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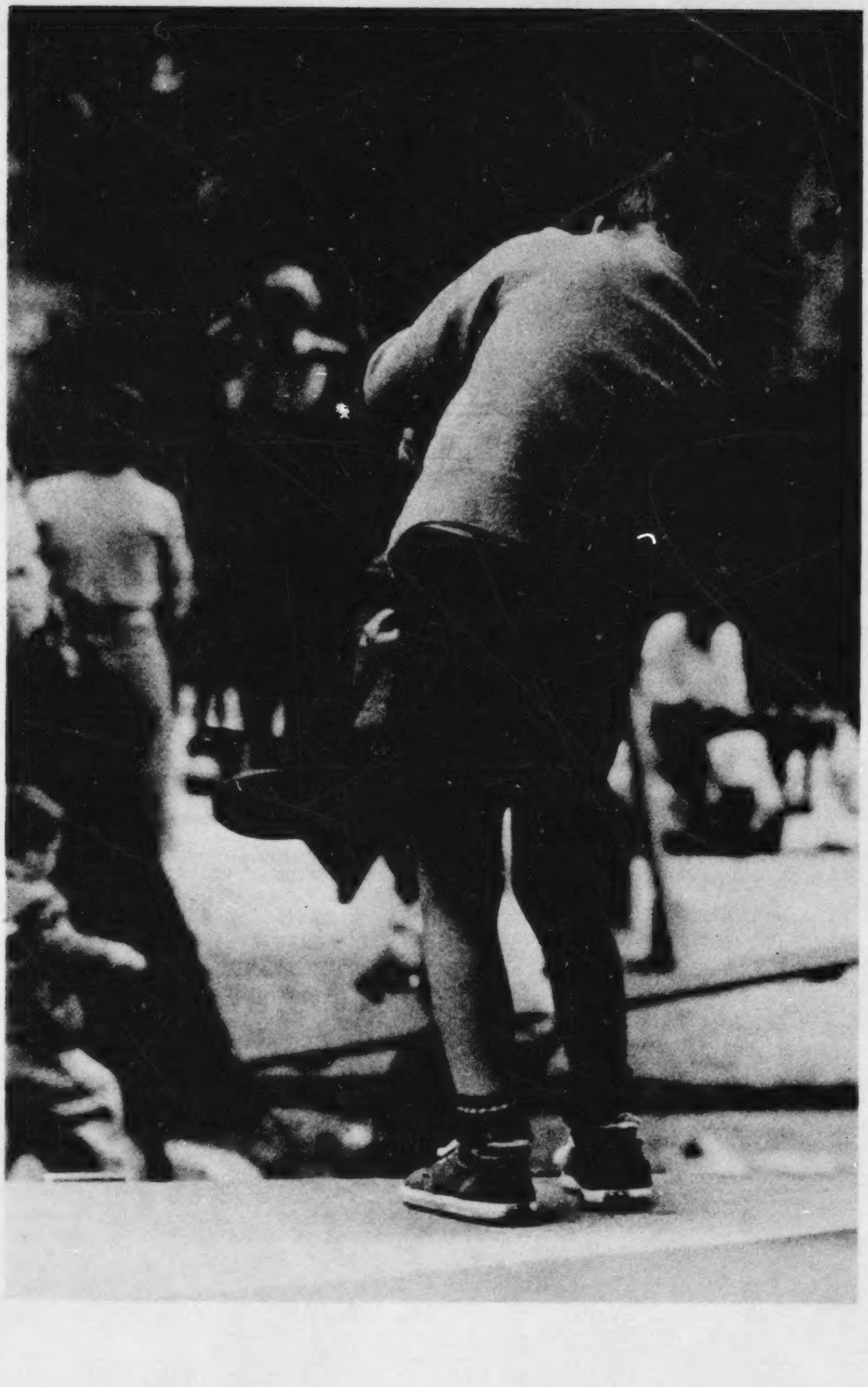

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Postscript: Reassessing the Teacher's Status in this Society

Lilah Christina Carney

> *...By what criterion is elementary teaching judged to be easier than the teaching required in the upper classes of primary schools, and that in its turn less difficult than teaching in secondary schools?...The only consideration that can justify this hierarchy is, of course, that of the subject matter to be taught, though solely when considered from the point of view of the standard of the knowledge itself and independently of the greater or lesser facility with which it can be assimilated by the students...The younger the child the more difficult it is to teach him, and the more pregnant that teaching is with future consequences.*[1]

It is just this fact of the far-reaching implications of our influence upon children that has turned education into such a political issue, in part because some factions place more emphasis on some of the implications than on others. Though teachers are not particularly respected, our influence is feared, and our functioning is kept under close scrutiny--at least, one gets that impression, living in Pasadena. Perhaps Pasadena today is not the typical community with regard to the politics of education, but it is actually the kind of place that forces us to really examine who we are and what we are doing. More teachers should, though I can think of more pleasant conditions under which to do so.

Throughout Piaget's writings on education there is deep respect, not only for children, but also for the adults who work with them. Perhaps more than any other contemporary writer, Piaget sees the full implications of the responsibility undertaken by the teaching profession--something which, as he points out, even we ourselves often fail to recognize. In these few pages, I want to share the increasing respect with which I look at myself, a teacher of young children.

I am fascinated by the fact that we have a choice in the kind of teachers we are. It increases the sense of respect I have for teaching as it increases the responsibility I feel for knowing what I am doing and how to articulate it. However, I am aware that the choice I make doesn't happen in a vacuum, and that there are many people who aren't going to agree with the decision I make, the methods I use, how the children address me, or what my classroom looks like. Everyone involved should have choice. I believe we must take seriously this matter of providing options.

A classroom is a complex setting at the intersection of several emotionally-charged realities: the reality of the society which must educate and socialize its young; the reality of families each enacting their dramas within the context of the culture; the realities of children who are becoming individuals in this era and will become adults in another; and the reality of the teacher--a person whose professional responsibility is to balance her personal identity and values with the hopes, dreams, fears, and limitations of all the others. Some of the skills demanded of teachers go far beyond the usual assumptions made about the job. Above all others is the skill of juggling all the realities of these other factions and balancing them with one's own--the reality that every moment in the classroom teachers are making decisions that conflict with someone else's needs or values.

No other position in this interaction has a reciprocal obligation to consider the reality of the teacher. She is often the only adult in that room every day with all those children, trying to decide which of all the infinitely many needs to meet first, which to ignore, which to forgive herself for having too little time and energy, too few eyes and hands to meet at all. Few parents, trustees, or legislators have been teachers; not many could begin to understand her situation if it occurred to them to try. Because the issue at stake often involves the fate of their child or their nation, their taxes or reelection, the emotional demands of their own realities take precedence over any attempt to step outside themselves and examine the teacher's situation or the reasonableness of their expectations.

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[1] Jean Piaget, *The Science of Education and the Psychology of the Child.* New York: Viking Press, 1969, pp. 126-127.

When public officials do take a look at the job teachers are doing, they don't have enough knowledge of the complexity of the task to resist the temptations of those who offer "revolutionary new approaches to instruction." Many of these are based on "principles used successfully in industry, government, and the armed services," and look like sensible answers to the inefficiency they think they perceive. Why not buy a system that will enable teachers to "write working academic and value objectives that clearly indicate the size of the teaching job, guide the organization of learning activities, precisely specify what is to be learned, and provide testable ultimate ends?"[2]

I am not saying that accountability. per se, is bad, nor that I want to be free of "academic and value objectives." On the contrary, I see the need for much more of them to originate within the profession, because right now we are vulnerable to parents and politicians and to the quick-and-easy solution peddlers who see only a part of the reality with which we are dealing. The task we are faced with is much more complex than most people want to admit, and anyone who promises "complete, quick, effective, and inexpensive" gimmicks can be counted on to have objectives in mind other than those that really matter in the lives of children.

What are the objectives that matter? Again it comes to making choices based on value judgments, because every approach can cite "experimental findings" to back it up or cut others down. I aim for a style of education based on the psychological realities of the child, as I understand them. It is clearly a relative decision, but I've put my money on it--and my life, in a way. I am trying to come closer and closer in my teaching to what will really matter for the children now, as they are growing, and in the long run, when they are grown. Political vested interest and economic expediency do not take precedence.

This is partly noble sentiment and also partly a will to self-preservation on my part. For it is the realities of the children which, day in, day out, either mesh or conflict with the reality of the teacher. The quality of this merging of two disparate realities determines how all those immediately involved thrive, and, indeed for some, whether or not they survive at all--the teacher (me!) included.

Perhaps it sounds extreme to say that the issue is one of survival. I do not mean living or dying in a physical sense, but in the sense of teachers surviving as professionals, being able to remain adults who care about children and feel that they are providing them with an invaluable service by being their teachers. And for children, it is their survival as learners, as persons with a sense of their own worth and the value of the world as a place to explore and participate. I am interested in the balance a teacher strikes between the reality of the schools--grim as it often is--and the ideal--impossible to attain as it always is. I have a feeling it is the nature of this balance that makes the effort involved either worth it or not.

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[2] From an advertisement for the Administrative Educator's Book Club. "Complete, quick, effective, and inexpensive," they claim.

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